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# SCREEN

**John Ford's Young Mr Lincoln**  
**The English Hitchcock**  
**Cinema Verite in America**  
**Interview: Ivor Montagu**

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Next issue (No. 11) focuses on Alec Guinness, the poses of  
Old Westerns, screenwriter Walter Newman, and

Lindberg.



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poses of  
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SOC.

In the *Cahiers* editorial 'Cinema/Ideology/Criticism' (*Screen* v 12 n 1), Ford films were placed along with those of Dreyer and Rossellini in a category of 'films which seem at first sight to belong firmly within the ideology and to be completely under its sway, but which turn out to be so only in an ambiguous manner.' These are films whose ideological project, often frankly reactionary, come to be subverted by the formal means of its presentation, so that a gap, a dislocation appears between the film text and its apparent ideology. 'An internal criticism is taking place which cracks the film apart at the seams . . . it is splitting under an internal tension which is simply not there in an ideologically innocuous film. The ideology thus becomes subordinate to the text. It no longer has an independent existence: it is *presented* by the film.'

The *Cahiers* text on *Young Mr Lincoln*, which we reprint, is a concrete extended analysis of a film within this category. The *Cahiers* writers describe a disjuncture in the film between its formal signifiers (realised at the levels of narrative, imagery, staging, lighting, camera) and the ideology which these are intended to project such that the presentation of the ideology in the text is criticised by the text. The deployment of psychoanalytic categories by the *Cahiers* writers, derived from the work of Lacan, is justified by their search for what is repressed in the film (politics, eroticism, violence) and the signs which indicate the effort involved in that repression.

The ideology of Ford's film which the *Cahiers* writers describe variously as 'the Apology of the Word' (natural law and the truth of nature inscribed in Blackstone and in the Farmers' Almanac), the valorisation of the complex Law/Nature/Woman, the repression of violence by the Law, and the suppression of history by the myth, are disrupted by the film's signifiers. For example the violence repressed by the Law and the Word is reinstated by the violence of that repression (Lincoln's castrating look, the murder, the lynching). The ideology is further disrupted by its re-assertion and re-iteration in the text in differing contexts to the point where the re-assertions become parody (hence self-critical of the meanings it presents).

Whereas the *Cahiers* search for 'meaning' is in the disjuncture between content and form, signified and sign, the ideology and the text, what is not said, in the hollows and in the gaps, the analysis by John Smith of Hitchcock's English works accepts the coherence of Hitchcock's apparent ideological project (conservative individualism, the re-assertion of order from disorder, absolution from guilt, re-integration into society, law and order).

If *Cahiers* explores 'breaks', Smith is after unities and synthesis

and the films which appear most coherent (form and content perfectly integrated) are those which are deemed 'best'. 3

It can be assumed that where Smith finds patterns of meaning re-asserted and developed in Hitchcock as signs of coherence of Hitchcock's world (ideology), the *Cahiers* would find precisely in an 'apparent formal coherence . . . that it is riddled with cracks.'

The *Cahiers*, their politics apart, are involved in aesthetic problems which relate to the insights of structural linguistics and semiology – the sign as a Janus like entity in which signified and signifier are both united and opposed so that the search for meaning is in that area of separation within and between signs, and, by extension between form and content, language and thought. (See *Screen* v 12 n 4 pp 162-166).

John Smith relates to an older and I think incorrect aesthetic position, but one nevertheless in the mainstream of British film criticism ('where there is no distinction between how and what, content and form, is what interests us if we are interested in film as film' V F Perkins *Film as Film*). Both formalism (see the *Lef* and *Novy Lef* texts in *Screen* v 12 n 4) and semiology have revealed the essential realist and hence ideological impulse involved in this species of romantic aesthetics and at the same time, in work on the sign systems of art, have theoretically demonstrated the untenability of that aesthetics. The critical work of *Screen*, in part directed towards an alternation in the mainstream of British criticism, will proceed in this theoretical path.



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## A collective text by the Editors of Cahiers du Cinéma

Lincoln is not the product of popular revolution: the banal game of universal suffrage, ignorant of the great historical tasks that must be achieved, has raised him to the top, him, a plebeian a self-made man who rose from being a stone breaker to being the Senator for Illinois, a man lacking intellectual brilliance, without any greatness of character, with no exceptional value, because he is an average, well-meaning man. (Friedrich Engels and Karl Marx, *Die Presse*, 12-10-1862)

At one point in our interview, Mr Ford was talking about a cut sequence from *Young Mr Lincoln*, and he described Lincoln as a shabby figure, riding into town on a mule, stopping to gaze at a theatre poster. 'This poor ape,' he said, 'wishing he had enough money to see Hamlet'. Reading over the edited version of the interview it was one of the few things Ford asked me to change; he said he didn't much like 'the idea of calling Mr Lincoln a poor ape'. (Peter Bogdanovich, *John Ford*, Studio Vista, London, 1967).

*Young Mr Lincoln*: American film by John Ford. *Script*: Lamar Trotti. *Photography*: Bert Glennon. *Music*: Alfred Newman. *Art direction*: Richard Day, Mark Lee Kirk. *Set decorations*: Thomas Little. *Editor*: Walter Thompson. *Costume*: Royer. *Sound assistant*: Robert Parrish. *Cast*: Henry Fonda (Abraham Lincoln), Alice Brady (Abigail Clay), Arleen Wheelan (Hannah Clay), Marjorie Weaver (Mary Todd), Eddie Collins (Efe Turner), Pauline Moore (Ann Rutledge), Ward Bond (J Palmer Cass), Richard Cromwell (Matt Clay), Donald Meek (John Felder), Judith Dickens (Carrie Sue), Eddie Quillan (Adam Clay), Spencer Charters (Judge Herbert A Bell), Milburn Stone (Stephen A Douglas), Cliff Clark (Sheriff Billings), Robert Lowery (juror), Charles Tannen (Ninian Edwards), Francis Ford (Sam Boone), Fred Kohler, Jr (Scrub White), Kay Linaker (Mrs Edwards), Russel Simpson (Woolridge), Charles Halton (Hawthorne), Clarence Wilson (Dr Mason), Edwin Maxwell (John T Stuart), Robert Homans (Mr Clay), Jack Kelly (Matt Clay boy), Dickie Jones (Adam Clay boy), Harry Tyler (barber), Louis Mason (clerk), Jack Pennick (Big Buck), Steven Randall (juror), Paul Burns, Frank Orth, George Chandler, Dave Morris, Dorothy Vaughan, Virginia Brissac, Elizabeth Jones. *Producer*: Kenneth Macgowan. *Executive producer*: Darryl F Zanuck. *Production*: Cosmopolitan/Twentieth Century Fox, 1939. *Distribution*: Associated Cinemas. Length: 101mn.

## I

This text inaugurates a series of studies the need for which was indicated in the editorial of issue No 218. We must now specify the objects and method of this work, and the origin of its necessity which has hitherto been merely affirmed.

1. Object: a certain number of 'classic' films, which today are *readable* (and therefore, anticipating our definition of method we will designate this work as one of reading) insofar as we can dis-

- 6   tinguish the historicity of their inscription:<sup>1</sup> the relation of these films to the codes (social, cultural . . .) for which they are a site of intersection, and to other films, themselves held in an inter-textual space; therefore, the relation of these films to the ideology which they convey, a particular 'phase' which they represent, and to the events (present, past, historical, mythical, fictional) which they aimed to represent.

For convenience we will retain the term 'classic' (though obviously in the course of these studies we will have to examine, and perhaps even challenge it, in order finally to construct its theory). The term is convenient in that it roughly designates a cinema which has been described as based on analogical representation and linear narrative ('transparence' and 'presence') and is therefore apparently completely held within the 'system' which subtends and unifies these concepts. It has obviously been possible to consider the Hollywood cinema as a model of such 'classicism' insofar as its reception has been totally dictated by this system – and limited to a kind of non-reading of the films assured by their apparent non-writing, which was seen as the very essence of their mastery.

2. Our work will therefore be a *reading* in the sense of a *re-scanning* of these films. That is, to define it negatively first: (a) it will not be (yet another) commentary. The function of the commentary is to distill an ideally constituted sense presented as the object's ultimate meaning (which however remains elusive indefinitely, given the infinite possibilities of talking about film): a wandering and prolific pseudo-reading which misses the reality of the inscription, and substitutes for it a discourse consisting of a simple ideological delineation of what appear(s) to be the main statement(s) of the film at a given moment.

(b) Nor will it be a new *interpretation*, ie the translation of what is supposed to be already in the film into a critical system (meta-language) where the interpreter has the kind of absolute knowledge of the exegetist blind to the (historical) ideological determination of his practice and his object-pretext, when he is not a hermeneute à la Viridiana slotting things into a pre-ordained structure.

(c) Nor will this be a dissection of an object conceived of as a closed structure, the cataloguing of progressively smaller and more 'discrete' units; in other words, an inventory of the elements which ignores their predestination for the film maker's writing project and, having added a portion of intelligibility to the initial object, claims to deconstruct, then reconstruct that object, without taking any account of the dynamic of the inscription. Not, therefore, a mechanistic structural reading.

(d) Nor finally will it be a demystification in the sense where it is enough to re-locate the film within its historical determinations, 'reveal' its assumptions, declare its problematic and its aesthetic prejudices and criticise its statement in the name of a mechanically

applied materialist knowledge, in order to see it collapse and feel no more needs to be said. This amounts to throwing the baby out with the bathwater without getting wet. To be more precise, it would be disposing of the film in a moralist way, with an argument which separates the 'good' from the 'bad', and evading any effective reading of it. (An effective reading can only be such by returning on its own deciphering operation and by integrating its functioning into the text it produces, which is something quite different from brandishing a method – even if it is marxist-leninist – and leaving it at that.)

It is worth recalling that the external and mechanistic application of possibly even rigorously constructed concepts has always tried to pass for the exercise of a theoretical practice: and – though this has long been established – that an artistic product cannot be linked to its socio-historical context according to a linear, expressive, direct causality (unless one falls into a reductionist historical determinism), but that it has a complex, mediated and *decentred* relationship with this context, which has to be rigorously specified (which is why it is simplistic to discard 'classic' Hollywood cinema on the pretext that since it is part of the capitalist system it can only reflect it). Walter Benjamin has insisted strongly on the necessity to consider literary work (but similarly any art product) not as a reflection of the relations of production, but as having a place *within* these relations (obviously he was talking of progressive works, past, present, and to come; but a materialist reading of art products which appear to lack any intentional critical dimension concerning capitalist relations of production must do the same thing. We will return later at greater length to this basic notion of 'the author as producer'). In this respect we must once again quote Macherey's theses on literary production (in particular those concerning the Leninist corrections to Trotsky and Plekhanov's simplistic positions on Tolstoy) and Badiou's concerning the autonomy of the aesthetic process and the complex relation historical truth/ideologies/author (as place and not as 'internalisation')/work.

And that, given this, denouncing ideological assumptions and ideological production, and designating them as falsification and error, has never sufficed to ensure that those who operated the critique themselves produced truth. Nor what's more has it sufficed to bring out the truth about the very things they are opposing. It is therefore absurd to demand that a film account for what it doesn't say about the positions and the knowledge which form the basis from which it is being questioned; and it is too easy (but of what use?) to 'deconstruct' it in the name of this same knowledge (in this case, the science of historical materialism which has to be practised as an active method and not used as a guarantee). Lest we be accused of dishonesty, let us make it clear that the points made in paragraph (d) refer to the most extreme positions within *Cinethique*.

- 8 3. At this point we seem to have come up against a contradiction: we are not content to demand that a film justify itself vis à vis its context, and at the same time we refuse to look for 'depth', to go from the 'literal meaning' to some 'secret meaning'; we are not content with what it says (what it intends to say). This is only an apparent contradiction. What will be attempted here through a re-scansion of these films in a process of active reading, is to make them say what they have to say *within* what they leave unsaid, to reveal their constituent lacks; these are neither faults in the work (since these films, as Jean-Pierre Oudart has clearly demonstrated – see the preceding issue – are the work of extremely skilled film makers) nor a deception on the part of the author (for why should he practice deception?); they are *structuring absences*, always displaced – an overdetermination which is the only possible basis from which these discourses could be realised, the unsaid included in the said and necessary to its constitution. In short, to use Althusser's expression – 'the internal shadows of exclusion'.

The films we will be studying do not need filling out, they do not demand a teleological reading, nor do we require them to account for their *external* shadows (except purely and simply to dismiss them); all that is involved is traversing their statement to locate what sets it in place, to double their writing with an active reading to reveal what is already there, but silent (cf the notion of *palimpsest* in Barthes and Daney), to make them say not only 'what this says, but what it doesn't say because it doesn't want to say it' (J A Miller, and we would add: what, while intending to leave unsaid, it is nevertheless obliged to say).

4. What is the use of such a work? We would be obliged if the reader didn't envisage this as a 'Hollywood revisited'. Anyone so tempted is advised to give up the reading with the very next paragraph. To the rest we say: that the structuring absences mentioned above and the establishment of an ersatz which this dictates have some connection with the sexual *other scene*, and that 'other other scene' which is politics; that the double repression – politics and eroticism – which our reading will bring out (a repression which cannot be indicated once and for all and left at that but rather has to be written into the constantly renewed process of its repression) allows the answer to be deduced; and this is an answer whose very question would not have been possible without the two discourses of overdetermination, the Marxist and the Freudian. This is why we will not choose films for their value as 'eternal masterpieces' but rather because the negatory force of their writing provides enough *scope* for a reading – because they can be re-written.

## 2. Hollywood in 1938-39

One of the consequences of the 1929 economic crisis was that the major banking groups (Morgan, Rockefeller, DuPont, Hearst, General Motors, etc) strengthened their grip on the Hollywood

firms which were having problems (weakened by the talkies' 'new patents war' . 9

As early as 1935, the five Major Companies (Paramount, Warner, MGM, Fox, RKO) and the three Minor (Universal, Columbia, United Artists) were totally controlled by bankers and financiers, often directly linked to one company or another. Big Business's grip on Hollywood had already translated itself (aside from economic management and the ideological orientation of the American Cinema) into the regrouping of the eight companies in the MPPA (Motion Pictures Producers Association) and the creation of a central system of self-censorship (the Hays code – the American bank is known to be puritanical: the major shareholder of the Metropolitan in New York, Morgan, exercised a real censorship on its programmes).

It was precisely in 1935 that, under the aegis of the Chase National Bank, William Fox's Fox (founded in 1914) merged with Darryl F Zanuck's 20th Century Productions, to form 20th Century Fox, where Zanuck became vice-president and took control.

During the same period, and mainly in 1937-38 the American cinemas suffered from a very serious drop in box-office receipts (this is first attributed to the consequences of the recession, then, with the situation getting worse, to lack of regeneration of Hollywood's stock of stars); the bank's boards, very worried, ordered a *maximum reduction in costs of production*. This national marketing crisis (in a field in which Hollywood films previously covered their entire costs, foreign sales being mainly a source of profits) was made even worse by the reduced income from foreign sales; this was due to the political situation in Europe, the gradual closure of the German and Italian markets to American films, and the currency blockade set up by these two countries.

### 3. The USA in 1938-39

In 1932, in the middle of the economic crisis, the democrat Roosevelt became President, succeeding the Republican Hoover whose policies, both economic (favourable to the trusts, deflationist) and social (leaving local groups and charitable organisations to deal with unemployment: cf *Mr Deeds Goes to Town*, Capra) had been incapable of avoiding the crisis and also of suppressing its effects. Roosevelt's policies were the opposite; federal intervention in the whole country's economic and social life, States as private powers (New Deal); establishment of federal intervention and public works agencies, impinging on the rights and areas previously reserved to State legislature and private companies; a controlled economy, social budget etc): so many measures which encountered violent opposition from the republicans and Big Business. In 1935 they succeeded: the Supreme Court declares Roosevelt's federal economic intervention agencies to be unconstitutional (because they interfere with the rights of the States). But Roosevelt's second

- 10 victory in 1936 smashed these manoeuvres, and the Supreme Court, threatened with reform, ended up by recognising the New Deal's social policies and (among others) the right to unionise.

At the level of the structures of American society, the crisis and its remedies have caused the strengthening of the federal State and increased its control over the individual States and the Trust's policies: by its 'conditional subsidies', its nationwide economic programmes, its social regulations, the federal government took control of vast areas which had previously depended only on the authority of the States and on the interests of free enterprise. In 1937, 'the dualist' interpretation of the 10th amendment of the Constitution – which forbade any federal intervention in the economic and social policies of the States (their private domain) – was abrogated by the Supreme Court from its judgments. This strengthening of federal power at all levels had the effect of *increasing the President's power*.

But, as early as 1937, a new economic crisis emerged: economic activity dropped by 37% compared to 1929, the number of unemployed was again over 10 million in 1938, and despite the re-floating of major public works, stayed at 9 million in 1939 (cf *The Grapes of Wrath*). The war (arms industries becoming predominant in the economy) was to help end the new crisis by allowing full employment . . .

Federal centralism, isolationism, economic reorganisation (including Hollywood), strengthening of the Democrat-Republican opposition, new threats of internal and international crisis, crisis and restrictions in Hollywood itself; such is the fairly gloomy context of the *Young Mr Lincoln* (1939) undertaking.

It is no doubt difficult, but necessary to attempt to estimate the total and respective importance of these factors to the project and the ideological 'message' of the film. In Hollywood, more than anywhere else the cinema is not 'innocent'. Creditor of the capitalist system, subject to its constraints, its crises, its contradictions, the American cinema, the main instrument of the ideological super-structure, is heavily determined at every level of its existence. As a product of the capitalist system and of its ideology, its role is in turn to reproduce the one and thereby to help the survival of the other. Each film, however, is inserted into this circuit according to its specificity, and there has been no analysis if one is content to say that each Hollywood film confirms and spreads the ideology of American capitalism: it is the precise articulations (rarely the same from one film to the next) of the film and of the ideology which must be studied (see I).

#### 4. Fox and Zanuck

20th Century Fox (which produced *Young Mr Lincoln*), because of its links with Big Business, also supports the Republican Party. From its inception the Republican Party has been the party of the



'Great Families'. Associated with (and an instrument of) industrial development, it rapidly became the 'party of Big Business' and follows its social and economic directives: protectionism to assist industry, anti-unionist struggle, moral reaction and racism (directed against immigrants and Blacks – whom the party had fleetingly championed in Lincoln's time: but it is common knowledge that this was due once again to economic reasons and to pressures from religious groups, groups which fifty years later, were to lead a campaign against everything that is 'unamerican'.

In power from 1928 to 1932 with Hoover as president, the Republican Party is financed by some of Hollywood's masters (Rockefeller, Dupont de Nemours, General Motors, etc). At the elections in 1928 87% of the people listed in *Who's Who in America* supported Hoover. He has put the underwriters of Capital at key posts in the administration: the Secretary to the Treasury is none other than Mellon, the richest man in the world (take an example of his policies: he brings down the income tax ceiling from 65% in 1919 to 50% in 1921, and 26% in 1929).

Forced by Roosevelt to make a number of concessions, American Big Business goes to war against the New Deal as soon as the immediate effects of the depression decrease (for example, the private electricity companies withdraw their advertising – which, in the USA is equivalent to a death sentence – from the newspapers which support Roosevelt and his Tennessee Valley Authority) and they do everything in their power to win the 1940 election.

All this allows us to assume that in 1938-39, Fox, managed by the (also) Republican Zanuck, participated in its own way in the Republican offensive by producing a film on the legendary character Lincoln. Of all the Republican Presidents, he is not only the most famous, but on the whole the only one capable of attracting mass support, because of his humble origins, his simplicity, his righteousness, his historical role, and the legendary aspects of his career and his death.

This choice is, no doubt, all the less fortuitous on the part of Fox (which – through Zanuck and the contracted producer Kenneth Macgowan – is as usual responsible for taking the initiative in the project, and not Ford) that during the preceding season, the Democrat Sherwood's play 'Abe Lincoln in Illinois' had been a great success on Broadway. With very likely the simultaneous concern to anticipate the adaptations planned in Hollywood of Sherwood's play (John Cromwell's film with Raymond Massey came out the same year and, unlike Ford's, was very successful), and to reverse the impact of the play and of Lincoln's myth in favour of the Republicans, Zanuck immediately put *Young Mr Lincoln* into production – it would, however, be wrong to exaggerate the film's political determinism which cannot, under any circumstances, be seen, in contrast, for example, to Zanuck's personal productions, *The Grapes of Wrath*, or *Wilson*, as promoting the company's line.

Producer Kenneth Macgowan's past is that of a famous theatre man. Along with Robert Edmond Jones and Eugene O'Neill, he has been manager of the Provincetown Playhouse; they had had a considerable influence on American theatre. A friend of Ford's, whom he met at RKO during the period of *The Informer*, he moved over to Fox in 1935 (there he produced *Four Men and a Prayer* among others) and became the man responsible for historical biographies which constitute the core of the company's productions.

*Young Mr Lincoln* is far from being one of Fox's most important productions in 1939, but this film was shot in particularly favourable conditions; it is one of the few cases in which the original undertaking was least distorted, at least at the production stage: of thirty films produced by Macgowan in the eight years he spent at Fox (1935-43) this is one of the only two which were written by only one scriptwriter (Lamar Trotti) (the other being *The Return of Frank James*, written by S M Hellman). Another thing to remark on: these two scripts were written in close collaboration with the directors, who were therefore, involved at a very early stage instead of being chosen at the last minute, as is the custom, even at Fox (the 'directors studio'). Ford even says of the script: 'We wrote it together' (with L Trotti) a rare if not exceptional statement coming from him.

Lamar Trotti had already written two comedies on old America for Ford (of the species known as 'Americana') *Judge Priest* and *Steamboat Round the Bend*, before specialising in historical films with Fox (such as *Drums Along the Mohawk*, directed by Ford after *Young Mr Lincoln*).

The background to a whole section of the script is the obsession with lynching and legality which is so strong in the thirties' cinema, because of the increase in expeditive justice (lynching), the consequences of gangsterism, the rebirth of terrorist organisations such as the KKK (cf Lang's *Fury*, Mervyn LeRoy's *They Won't Forget*, Archie Mayo's *Black Legion*). Trotti, a southerner (he was born in Atlanta and had been a crime reporter before editing a local Hearst paper), combined one of Lincoln's most famous anecdotes with a memory from his youth. 'When Trotti was a reporter in Georgia he had covered the trial of two young men accused of murder at which their mother, the only witness, would not tell which son had committed the crime. Both were hanged' (Robert G Dickson, 'Kenneth Macgowan' in *Films in Review*, October 1963). In Lincoln's story, a witness stated having seen, in the moonlight an acquaintance of Lincoln's (Duff Armstrong) participate in a murder. Using an almanac as evidence, Lincoln argued that the night was too dark for the witness to have seen anything and thus obtained Armstrong's acquittal with this plea.

## 5. Ford and Lincoln

Ford had already spent the greater part of his career with Fox: he

made thirty-eight movies between 1920 and 1935! Since Zanuck's take over, he had made four movies in two years, the first in 1936 *The Prisoner of Shark Island* ('I haven't killed Lincoln'). Thus it was to one of the company's older and more trustworthy directors that the project was entrusted. The same year, again with Zanuck, Ford shot *Drums Along the Mohawk* (whose ideological orientation is glaringly obvious: the struggle of the pioneers, side by side with Washington and the Whigs against the English in alliance with the Indians) and in 1940 *The Grapes of Wrath* which paints a very gloomy portrait of the America of 1938-39. Despite the fact that he calls himself a-political we know that Ford in any case greatly admires Lincoln as a historical figure and as a person: Ford, too, claims humble peasant origins – but this closeness with Lincoln as a man is, however, moderated by the fact that Ford is also, if not primarily, Irish and Catholic.

In 1924 already, in *The Iron Horse*, Lincoln appears as favouring the construction of the intercontinental railway (industry and unification); at the beginning of *The Prisoner of Shark Island* we see Lincoln requesting 'Dixie' from an orchestra after the Civil War (this is the tune which he 'already' plays in *Young Mr Lincoln*): symbolically, the emphasis is put on Lincoln's unifying, nonvindictive side and his deep southern sympathies by means of the hymn of the Confederation; in *Sergeant Rutledge* (1960) he is evoked by the Blacks as their Saviour; the anti-slavery aspect; in *How the West Was Won* (1962) the strategist is presented; finally in *Cheyenne Autumn* (1964), a cornered politician turns to a portrait of Lincoln, presented as the model for the resolution of any crisis.

Each of these films thus concentrates on a particular aspect either of Lincoln's synthetic personality or of his complex historical role; he thus appears to be a sort of universal referent which can be activated in all situations. As long as Lincoln appears in Ford's fiction as a myth, a figure of reference, a symbol of America, his intervention is natural, apparently in complete harmony with Ford's morality and ideology; the situation is different in a film like *Young Mr Lincoln* where he becomes the protagonist of the fiction. We will see that he can only be inscribed as a Fordian character at the expense of a number of distortions and reciprocal assaults (by him on the course of fiction and by fiction on his historical truth).

## 6. Ideological Undertaking

What is the subject of *Young Mr Lincoln*? Ostensibly and textually it is 'Lincoln's youth' (on the classic cultural model – 'Apprenticeship and Travels'). In fact – through the expedient of a simple chronicle of events presented (through the presence and actualisation effect specific to classic cinema) as if they were taking place for the first time under our eyes, it is the *reformulation* of the historical figure of Lincoln on the level of the myth and the eternal.

This ideological project may appear to be clear and simple – of

- 14 the edifying and apologetic type. Of course, if one considers its statements alone, extracting it as a *separable ideological statement* disconnected from the complex network of determinations through which it is realised and inscribed – through which it possibly even criticises itself – then it is easy to operate an illusory deconstruction of the film through a reading of the demystificatory type (see 1). Our work, on the contrary, will consist in activating this network in its complexity, where philosophical assumptions (idealism, theologism), political determinations (republicanism, capitalism) and the relatively autonomous aesthetic process (characters, cinematic *signifiers*, narrative mode) specific to Ford's writing, intervene simultaneously. If our work, which will necessarily be held to the linear sequentiality of the discourse, should isolate the orders of determination interlocking in the film, it will always be in the perspective of their relations: it therefore demands a recurrent reading, on all levels.

## 7. Methodology

*Young Mr Lincoln*, like the vast majority of Hollywood films, follows linear and chronological narrative, in which events appear to follow each other according to a certain 'natural' sequence and logic. Thus two options were open to us: either, in discussing each of the determining moments, to simultaneously refer to all the scenes involved; or to present each scene in its fictional chronological order and discuss the different determining moments, emphasising in each case what we believe to be the main determinant (the key signification), and indicating the secondary determinants, which may in turn become the main determinant in other scenes. The first method thus sets up the film as the object of a reading (a text) and then supposedly takes up the totality of its over-determination networks simultaneously, *without taking account of the repressive operation* which, in each scene, determines the realisation of a key signification; while the second method *bases itself on the key signification of each scene*, in order to understand the scriptural operation (overdetermination and repression) which has set it up.

The first method has the drawback of turning the film into a text which is *readable a priori*; the second has the advantage of making the reading itself participate in the *film's process of becoming-a-text*, and of authorising such a reading only by what authorises it in each successive moment of the film. We have therefore chosen the latter method. The fact that the course of our reading will be modelled on the 'cutting' of the film into sequences is absolutely intentional, but the work will involve breaking down the closures of the individual scenes by setting them in action with each other and in each other.

## 8. The Poem

After the credits (and in the same graphic style: ie engraved in

marble) there is a poem which consists of a number of questions which 'if she were to come back on earth', Lincoln's mother would ask, concerning the destiny of her son.

(a) Let us simply observe for the moment that the figure of the mother is inscribed from the start, and that it is an absent Mother, already dead, a symbolic figure who will only later make her full impact.

(b) The enumeration of questions on the other hand programmes the development of the film by designating Lincoln's problematic as being that of a choice: the interrogative form of this poem, like a matrix, generates the binary system (the necessity to choose between two careers, two pies, two plaintiffs, two defendants, etc) according to which the fiction is organised (see 14).

(c) In fact, the main function of the poem, which pretends that the questions posed therein haven't yet been answered (whereas they are only the simulation of questions since they presume the spectator's knowledge of Lincoln's *historical character*), is to set up the dualist nature of film and to initiate the process of a double reading. By inviting the spectator to ask himself 'questions' to which he already has the answers, the poem induces him to look at history – something which, for him, has already happened – as if it were 'still to happen'. Similarly, by on the one hand playing on a fictional structure of the *chronicle* type ('natural' juxtaposition and succession of events, as if they were not dictated by any determinism or directed towards a necessary end), and on the other hand by contriving, in the scenes where a crucial choice must be made by the character, a margin of *feigned indecisiveness* (as if the game had not already been played; Lincoln had not entered history, and as if he was taking every one of his decisions on the spot, in the present), the film thus effects a *naturalisation* of the Lincolnian myth (which already exists as such in the mind of the spectator).

The retroactive action of the spectator's knowledge of the myth on the chronicle of events, and the naturalist rewriting of the myth in the divisions of this chronicle thus impose a reading in the future perfect. 'What is realised in my story is not the past definite of what once was since it is no more, nor the perfect of what has been in what I am, but the future perfect of what I will have been for what I am in the process of becoming' (Lacan).

A classic *ideological* operation manifests itself here, normally, through questions asked after the event whose answer, which has already been given, is the very condition for the existence of the question.

## 9. The Electoral Speech

First scene. A politician dressed in townclothes (John T Stuart, later to become Lincoln's associate in Springfield) addresses a few farmers. He denounces the corrupt politicians who are in power and Andrew Jackson, President of the USA; he then introduces

16 the local candidate whom he is sponsoring: young Lincoln. The first shot, in which we see Lincoln, shows him sitting on a barrel leaning backwards, in shirtsleeves, wearing heavy boots (one recognises the classic casualness of Ford's hero, who has returned and/or is above everything). In the next shot, addressing the audience of farmers, Lincoln in a friendly tone (but not without a hint of nervousness) declares: 'My politics are short and sweet like your ladies' dances; I am in favour of a National Bank and for everybody's participation in wealth'. His first words are 'You all know who I am, plain Abraham Lincoln' – this is meant not only for the spectators in the film, who are anyway absent from the screen, but also to involve the spectator of the movie, brought into the cinematic space; thus this treatment in the future perfect is immediately confirmed (see 8).

This programme is that of the Whig party, at that time in opposition. It is in essence the programme of nascent American capitalism: protectionism to favour national industrial production, National Bank to favour the circulation of capital in all the states. The first point traditionally has a place in the programme of the republican party (it is thus easily recognisable to the spectator of 1939); the second calls to mind a point in history: while in power before 1830, the Whigs had created the National Bank (helping industrial development in the North) whose powers Jackson, who succeeded them, attempted to weaken: the defence of this bank was thus one of the demands of the Whigs, who later became Republicans.

(a) The specifically *political* notations which introduce the film, have the obvious function of presenting Lincoln as the candidate (that is, in the future perfect, the President, the champion) of the Republicans.

(b) But the scorn which is immediately shown towards the 'corrupt politicians' and the strength in the contrast of Lincoln's programme which is simple as 'a dance', have the effect of introducing him (and the Republicans in his wake) as the opposition and the remedy to such 'politics'. Furthermore we will see later that it is not only his opponents' politics which are 'corrupt', but all politics, condemned in the name of morality (the figure of Lincoln will be contrasted, with that of his opponent Douglas, with that of the prosecutor, as the defender of Justice versus the politicians, the Uncompromising versus the manipulators).

This disparagement of politics carries and confirms the *idealist* project of the film (see 4 and 6): moral virtues are worth more than political guile, the Spirit more than the Word (cf 4, 6, 8). (Likewise, politics appears again, later, as the object of discussion among drunks – quarrel between J P Cass and his acolyte – or of socialite conversation: carriage scene between Mary Todd and Douglas).

But what is most significant here is that the points of the elec-

toral programme are *the only indications of a positive relation* between Lincoln and politics, all others being negative (separating Lincoln from the mass of 'politicians').

(c) We may be surprised that a film on Lincoln's youth could thus empty out the truly political dimension from the career of the future President. This massive omission is too useful to the film's ideological purpose to be fortuitous. By playing once again on the spectator's knowledge of Lincoln's political and historical role it is possible to establish the idea that these were founded on and validated by a Morality superior to all politics (and could thus be neglected in favour of their Cause) and that Lincoln always draws his prestige and his strength from an intimate relationship with Law, from a (natural and/or divine) knowledge of Good and Evil. Lincoln starts with politics but soon rises to the moral level, divine right, which for an idealist discourse – originates and valorises all politics. Indeed, the first scene of the film already shows Lincoln as a political candidate without providing any information either on what may have brought him to this stage: *concealment of origins* (both his personal – family – origins and those of his political knowledge, however basic: that is 'his education') which establishes the mythical nature of the character; or on the results of this electoral campaign (we know that he was defeated, and that the Republicans' failure resulted in the shelving of the National Bank, among other things): as if they were in fact of no importance in the light of the already evident significance of fate and the myth. Lincoln's character makes all politics appear trivial.

But this very *repression* of politics, on which the ideological undertaking of the film is based, is itself a *direct result* of political assumptions (the eternal false idealist debate between morality and politics: Descartes versus Machiavelli) and at the level of its reception by the spectator, this repression is not without consequences of an equally political nature. We know that the ideology of American Capitalism (and the Republican Party which traditionally represents it) is to assert its divine right, to conceptualise it in terms of permanence, naturalism and even biology (cf Benjamin Franklin's famous formula: 'Remember that money has genital potency and fecundity') and to extol it as a universal Good and Power. The enterprise consisting of the concealment of politics (of social relations in America, of Lincoln's career) under the idealist mask of Morality has the effect of regilding the cause of Capital with the gold of myth, by manifesting the 'spirituality' in which American Capitalism believes it finds its origins and sees its eternal justification. The seeds of Lincoln's future were already sown in his youth – the future of America (its eternal values) is already written into Lincoln's moral virtues, which include the Republican Party and Capitalism.

(d) Finally, with the total suppression of Lincoln's political dimension, his main historico-political characteristic disappears from the

18 scene of the film: ie his struggle against the Slaver States. Indeed, neither in the initial political sequence, nor in the rest of the film is this dominant characteristic of his history, of his legend even, indicated, whereas it is mainly to it that Lincoln owes his being inscribed into American history more than any other President (Republican or otherwise).

Strangely enough, only one allusion is made to slavery (this exception has the value of a signal): Lincoln explains to the defendants' family that he had to leave his native state since 'with all the slaves coming in, white folks just had a hard time making a living'. The fact that this comment emphasises the economic aspects of the problem at the expense of its moral and humanitarian aspects would appear to contradict the points outlined above (primacy of morality over politics) if Lincoln had not spoken these words in a scene (see 19) where he puts himself in the imaginary role of the son of the poor farmer family. He recalls his own origins as a poor white who, like everyone else, suffered from unemployment. The accent is thus put on the economic problem, ie the problem of the whites, not the blacks.

The *not-said* here, this exclusion from the scene of the film of Lincoln's most notable political dimension, can also not be fortuitous (the 'omission' would be enormous!), it too must have *political significance*.

On the one hand, it was indeed necessary to present Lincoln as the unifier, the harmoniser, and not the divider of America (this is why he likes playing 'Dixie': he is a Southerner). On the other hand, we know that the Republican Party, abolitionist by economic opportunism, after the Civil War rapidly reappeared as more or less racist and segregationist. (Already, Lincoln was in favour of a progressive emancipation of the blacks, which would only slowly give them equal rights with the whites). He never concealed the restrictions he asked for concerning the integration of blacks. Considering the political impact that the film could have in the context described above (see 3, 4) it would have been in bad taste on both these accounts to insist on Lincoln's liberating role.

This feature is thus silenced, excluded from the hero's youth, as if it had not appeared until later, when all the legendary figure's other features are given by the film as present from the outset and are given value by this predestination.

The shelving of this dimension (the Civil War) which is directly responsible for the Lincolnian Legend thus allows a political use of this legend and at the same time by castrating Lincoln of his historico-political dimension, reinforces the idealisation of the myth.

But the exclusion of this dominant sign from Lincoln's politics is also possible because *all the others* are rapidly pushed out (except for the brief positive and negative notations mentioned above which in any case are in play as *indicators* – of the general



repression of politics – and of stamping of the Republican cause by the seal of the Myth) and because this fact places the film immediately on the purely ideological plane (Lincoln's a-historical dimension, his symbolic value).

Thus what *projects the political meaning* of the film is not a directly political discourse: it is a *moralising discourse*. History, almost totally reduced to the time scale of the myth with neither past nor future can thus, at best only survive in the film in the form of a *specific repetition*: on the teleological model of history as a continuous and linear development of a pre-existing *seed*, of the future contained in the past (anticipation, predestination). Everything is there, all the features and characters of the historical scene are in their place (Mary Todd who will become Lincoln's wife, Douglas whom he will beat at the presidential elections, etc, right up to Lincoln's death: in a scene which Fox cut, before the film was first released, one could see Lincoln stop in front of a theatre presenting Hamlet and facing one of the (Booth family) troupe of actors – his future murderer), the problematic of deciding (see 14) and of unifying is already posed . . . The only missing thing is the main historical feature, this being the one on which the myth was first constructed.

But such repression is possible (acceptable by the spectator) only inasmuch as the film plays on what is *already known* about Lincoln treating it as if it were a factor of *non-recognition* and at the limit, a not-known (at least, something that nobody wants to know any more, which for having been known is all the more easily forgotten): it is the already constituted force of the myth which allows not only its reproduction, but also its reorientation. It is the universal knowledge of Lincoln's fate which allows, while restating it, the omission of parts of it. For the problem here is not to build a myth, but to negotiate its realisation and even more to rid it of its historical roots in order to liberate its universal and eternal meaning. 'Told', Lincoln's youth is in fact *rewritten* by what has to filter through the Lincolnian myth. The film establishes not only Lincoln's total predestination (teleological axis) but also that *only that to which he has been shown to be predestined* deserves immortality (theological axis). A double operation of addition and subtraction at the end of which the historical axis, having been abolished and mythified, returns cleansed of all impurities and thus recuperable to the service not just of Morality but of the morality re-asserted by capitalist ideology. Morality not only rejects politics and surpasses history, it also rewrites them.

## 10. The Book

Lincoln's electoral speech seems to open up a fiction: electoral campaign, elections . . . A problem is presented, which we have the right to expect to see solved, but which in fact will not be solved. To use the Barthesian formula, we have the elements of a herme-

20 neutic chain: enigma (will he or won't he be elected?) and non-resolution. This chain is abandoned by the use of an abrupt fictional displacement: the arrival of the family of farmers. Lincoln is called away to help them. This family comprises the father, the mother and two twelve year old boys. They want to buy some material from Lincoln thus informing us of his occupation: he is a shop-keeper. But the family has no money: Lincoln offers them credit, and confronted by the mother's embarrassment, argues that he himself has acquired his shop on credit. The situation is resolved by the use of barter: the family owns a barrel full of old books (left behind by the grandfather). Delighted at the mere mention of a book (legendary thirst for reading) Lincoln respectfully takes one out of the barrel: *as if by chance*, it is Blackstone's 'Commentaries'. He dusts the book, opens it, reads, realises that it is about Law (he says: 'Law') and is delighted that the book is in good condition (the Law is indestructible).

(a) It's a *family* (see 19) of pioneers who are *passing through* that give Lincoln the opportunity of coming in contact with Law: emphasis on the luck-predestination connection as well as on the fact that *even without knowing it* it is the humble who transmit Law (religiously kept by the family as legacy from the ancestor). On the other hand we have here a classic Fordian fictional feature (apart from the family as a displaced centre): meeting and exchange between two groups whose paths need not have crossed (a new fictional sequence is born from this very meeting; it is first presented as a suspension and simple digressive delay of the main narrative axis, later it constitutes itself as being central, until another sequence arises, functioning in the same mode, Ford's total fiction existing finally only as an articulation of successive digressions).

(b) Lincoln makes a brief but precise speech in praise of credit: 'I give you credit' – 'I don't like credit' (says the farmer-woman incarnating the dignity of the poor) – 'I myself bought my shop on credit': when one is aware of the role played by the extension of credit in the 1929 crisis, this kind of publicity slogan uttered by an American hero (who later, with ever increasing emphasis will be the Righteous man) tends to appear as a form of exorcism: without credit, the development of capital is impossible; in a period of recession (1935-40) when unemployment is high and wages have gone down, the maintenance of the level of consumption is the only thing which allows industry to carry on.

(c) The fact that Law is acquired by barter introduces a circuit of debt and repayments which is to run through the film (see 23).

(d) The principle function of this sequence is to introduce a number of constituent elements of the symbolic scene from which the film is to proceed, by *varying* and activating it (in this sense it is the true expository scene of the fiction, the first scene becoming pre-textual and possibly even *extra-textual*): The Book and the Law,

the Family and the Son, exchange and debt, predestination . . . This *setting up* of the fictional matrix means *putting aside* the first sequence (political speech): a simple digression, first believed to be temporary, but then seen to be in fact the first step in the operation of the repression of politics by morality which will continue through the whole film (see 9).

### 11. Nature, Law, Woman

Third sequence: lying in the grass under a tree, near a river, Lincoln is reading Blackstone's 'Commentaries'. He summarises its theories in a few sentences: 'The right to acquire and hold property . . . the right to life and reputation . . . and wrongs are a violation of those rights . . . that's all there is to it: right and wrong . . .' A young woman appears and expresses surprise that he should lie down while reading. He gets up and answers: 'When I'm lying down, my mind's standing up, when I'm standing up, my mind lies down'. They walk along the river discussing Lincoln's ambitions and culture (poets, Shakespeare, and now Law). They stop and while she is talking he starts to stare at her and tells her that he thinks she is beautiful. This declaration of love continues for a few moments, centred on the question of those who do and those who don't like redheads, then the young girl leaves the scene (the frame, the shot). Alone, Lincoln approaches the river and throws a stone into it. Close up of the ripples on the water.

(a) The first anecdotic *signifié* of the scene refers to Lincoln's legend: like any layman in law in the States at that time, Lincoln discovers Law in Blackstone. His 'Commentaries' were young America's legal Bible and they largely inspired the 1787 constitution. They are, in fact, no more than a summary and a confused vulgarisation of 18th Century English Law. The second anecdotic *signifié* (again made explicit in the following scene) is Lincoln's first acknowledged love affair, his relationship with Ann Rutledge – presented in the legend and the film as the ideal wife (who shares similar tastes) whom he will never meet again.

(b) Centred on Lincoln, the scene presents the relationship Law-Woman-Nature which will be articulated according to a system of complementarity and of substitution-replacement.

It is in nature that Lincoln communes with Law:

It is at the moment of this communion that he meets Woman: the relationship Lincoln-Woman replaces the relationship Lincoln-Law since Woman simultaneously interrupts Lincoln's reading of the book by her arrival and marks her appreciation of Lincoln's knowledge and encourages him in his vocation as man of knowledge and Law.

The declaration of love is made according to the classic (banal) cultural analogy Nature-Woman, in Nature (on the bank of a river). But above all the promotion of the river to the status of the woman corresponds to the Woman's (the wife's) disappearance from the

22 sequence (which in the fiction turns out to be definitive); this promotion is signalled by the throwing of the stone (see 18).

Just as culturally determined and codified as the relationship Nature-Woman, the equivalence Nature-Law is here underlined precisely by the fact that the Law book is Blackstone, for whom all forms of Law (the laws of gravitation as well as those which regulate society) grow from a natural Law which is none other than God's law. In the final analysis, this supreme law separates Good from Evil, and is indeed called upon to legislate on the soundness of other human laws (the spirit against the word, see 6, 7, 9). Consequence: the acquisition and the defence of property are here presented as being based on the natural, indeed, on the divine (cf the ideology of capitalism, 4, 9).

## 12. The Tomb, the Bet

The ripples caused by the stone falling in the river dissolve into ice breaking up on the same river, as a transition between the scenes. A 'dramatic' music underlines this passage. Lincoln arrives near a tomb covered in snow, near the river, at the spot where the preceding scene took place. Ann Rutledge's name can be read on the marble stone. Lincoln places a bunch of flowers on the tomb, while soliloquising on the return of spring ('the woods are already full of them too, the snow when it's drifting . . . ice breaking up . . . coming of the spring'). He says he is still hesitant on the path to follow: whether to stay in the village or to follow Ann's advice, go to town and choose a legal career. He picks up a twig of dead wood: if it falls towards Ann, he will choose law, if not, he will stay in the village. The twig falls on Ann's side. Lincoln, kneeling down, says: 'Well Ann, you win, it's the Law' and after a moment of silence 'I wonder if I could have tipped it your way just a little'. (a) The dissolve, which links the scene of the declaration of love (see 11) to that of the loved one's tomb, gives the impression that the transition from one to the other follows the same time-scale as the transition from summer to spring (the breaking ice) according to a symbolic (classic) opposition of the seasons: life/death (and resurrection). There is at the same time a smooth (continuous) succession from one season to the other, and a brutal contrast (Ann alive in one shot, dead in the next) between the two scenes. The effect of temporal continuity reinforces the violence of the contrast (the fictional shock) between life and death.

This process of temporal sequence and continuity (which is specific to great classical cinema) has in fact the function of absorbing referential time by juxtaposing and connecting two events (romance, death) separated by what will appear only later (at his arrival in Springfield) to be an interval of many years. This elimination has the effect of presenting Lincoln's first decisive choice (to become a lawyer) as if it had been neither thought out nor elaborated, nor rational: it *denies him the time of reflection*, it abolishes

all *work*. Thus, once again, following the film's general strategy, it submits the hero to predestination, by reducing referential time to cinematic time: new *coup de force* by the film.

(b) Lincoln's definitive acceptance of Law is thus, once again, made under Woman's direct influence (we have seen in 11 the nature of her relationship with Law and Nature) and is in phase with the awakening of nature. But despite the fact that this decision is inevitable, both because of the logic of the symbolic axis Woman-Nature-Law, and because of the spectator's knowledge of Lincoln's fate, the film skilfully creates suspense, pretending that luck could change the course of events. As with Hitchcock with whom suspense, far from being weakened by our knowledge of the outcome, is increased at each viewing by this knowledge, the tension built up in this scene, far from being compromised by our knowledge of Lincoln's future (perfect), is increased by it. The film's supreme guile then consists in reintroducing – deceptively – at the very end of the scene the indication of intention, a voluntary choice on Lincoln's part ('I wonder if I could have tipped it your way just a little') which is in fact, no more than a feigned delegation of power: as if Lincoln's already-accomplished destiny were referring to him to decide its path, following Spinoza's principle of '*verum index sui*', of truth as indicator of itself, *the self determination of an already determined figure*.

### 13. The Plaintiffs

Lincoln's arrival in Springfield. He sets himself up as a solicitor. Two Mormon farmers consult him, intending to take legal action. One owes the other money and the second has satisfied himself by violently beating up the first; therefore the first is claiming damages of an amount roughly equivalent to his debt. Having read the two plaintiffs' statements, Lincoln informs them of the quasi equivalence of their respective debts, the difference being equal to his bill; faced with their hesitation he threatens the use of force, if they don't accept his compromise. The farmers agree to pay him, and one of them tries to give him a fake coin. Lincoln first notices this by the sound it produces, then by biting the coin, and the scene ends on Lincoln's very insistent stare fixed on the forger.

(a) Lincoln's first legal act in the film is the solution of an extremely commonplace case. In fact, this anecdote which introduces the viewer to the violence of social relations in Lincoln's period, indicates his legal function which throughout the film is to repress violence even, as a final resort, by the use of a specifically legal violence (incarnated in Lincoln's physical strength but, most of the time simply manifested by a verbal threat).

(b) The scene insists on Lincoln's supreme *cleverness*, in resolving any situation, the Law being able to decide either by taking one side against the other, or like here, by craftily restoring the balance between the two sides of the scales. This second solution is obvi-

24 ously preferred by the film because it emphasises Lincoln's legendary unifying role.

(c) Lincoln knows about money: he is not interested in its origin (credit, exchange, debt form, a circle) but it has a ring, a consistency, a value. It is precisely about a money-swindle that Lincoln's *castrating power* (see 16 and 22) is manifested for the first time, as an empty, icy, terrifying stare and his speed at hitting his opponents where it hurts, characteristics which will constitute the terrifying dimension of Lincoln's figure accentuated from scene to scene. Here for the first time the supreme process of Law eclipses the anecdotal character of Lincoln.

It will be observed that this terrifying dimension widely exceeds all the connotative *signifiés* (whether psychological – 'I'm a farmer too, you can't fool me', or moral – reprobation, or situational, etc) which could be applied to it. The irreducible character of Lincoln's castrating figure will persist throughout the film, transcending, altering the ideological discourse.

#### 14. The Celebrations

It is in order to take part in the Independence Day celebrations that Lincoln is in such a hurry to conclude the quarrel between the farmers. This celebration is made up of a number of episodes, announced in a programme, the order of which we will follow: (a) a parade (in which Lincoln meets Douglas his opponent, and Mary Todd, his future wife); (b) a pie judging contest in which Lincoln is the judge (and during which the family from the first scene reappear); (c) a Tug of War (across a pond) in which Lincoln takes part (and in the course of which there is an incident between the family and two roughnecks); (d) a rail splitting contest (longitudinal section of a tree trunk) which Lincoln wins; (e) the burning of tar barrels.

(a) Lincoln is confronted by a historical evocation of America: the local militias parade past him, followed by the veterans of the war against Spain, and finally the survivors of the War of Independence, whom Lincoln salutes by removing his top hat. But Lincoln's slightly ridiculous solmenity is underlined on the one hand by the other spectators' joyful exuberance, and on the other by a succession of grotesque incidents, coupled with the veterans' shabby appearance, very much in the Fordian tradition.

(b) The principle of Justice (whether or not to choose) is here realised through a series of derivatives which exhaust all its modalities: either Lincoln literally splits a rail in two, and thus separates himself from, places himself above his opponents (adventitious meaning: affirmation of the physical strength of literally his cutting edge); or he doesn't hesitate to give *his* side, that is the right side, a helping hand, to help it win (by tying the rope to a horse-drawn cart): Law represented by its ideal figure has every right: just as it doesn't hesitate to use force (see 13, 16) so it doesn't shrink before

the use of cunning and deception; a deception whose scandalous aspect is masked by the triviality of the stake; and the 'Fordian gag' aspect of the action. Finally, more subtly, faced with the undecidable character of a situation (the ethic, or gastronomic, impossibility of preferring the product of one cook to that of another) the fiction itself must, by abandoning the scene, censor the moment of choice and not show Lincoln making an impossible choice, both for the sake of the scene and for that of the myth.

(c) The celebration sequence is made up of a series of fictionally autonomous *sketches* which are in fact determined by the necessity of presenting a certain number of Lincoln's features. This mode of narration continues and stresses that of the preceding scenes: namely a succession of sequences whose length can vary but which are all subject to the *unity of action*. Indeed each of them establishes a situation, presents, develops and syntagmatically encloses an action (whether this latter is resolved in terms of the diegesis or not: nothing said of the consequences of the electoral speech, no decision about the pies). (Insofar as it closes a scene only, the closure does not preclude the later reinvestment of any one of the elements which the scene has elevated to the status of a signifier: for example, the Law book or the Mother).

In fact it is at the moment of its greatest systematisation (a series of headings) that this mode of narration is *infiltrated by the first elements of a new narrative principle* (that of the detective story enigma and its solution: a hermeneutic chain which articulates all the following sequences). Indeed, during the different episodes of the celebration, characters who will all play a more or less important role in the problem are present: Douglas and Mary Todd, the Clay family, the two bad boys, and a few extras who will reappears at the lynching and the trial. This new narrative device is reinforced (at the end of the celebration) by a scene (between Carrie Sue and her fiancé, Matt, the younger Clay son) which seems to reproduce Hollywood's most banal clichés (chatter of lovers, discussion of the future: how many children); in fact it is important insofar as it is the first scene from which Lincoln is physically absent. He is, however, constantly mentioned: first, indirectly, by Carrie Sue, who is very excited by the celebration and makes her fiancé promise to bring her back every year (what can be here taken as a simple whim, the manifestation of innocent joy and desire – the innocence briefly unmasked when she tells Matt she wishes 'we was married right now . . .' – will be revealed and accentuated in all the scenes where Carrie Sue is present as the systematic denial of the violent erotic attraction provoked – not in her alone – by Lincoln of the direction indicated by the film in 19 where Lincoln identifies her with Ann Rutledge); then, directly, by the fiancé who says: 'I wish it was going to be that fella' splitting them rails again', taking it on himself to formulate on her behalf *what she cannot say*.

The new plot, which this scene develops and which is to dominate the rest of the film, started, as we noted with the appearance of a number of elements which disturb the course of the celebration and its narrative presentation; the deputy sheriff (Scrub White) and his friend (J Palmer Cass) somewhat worked up and high, pester Adam's (one of the Clay sons) wife. A fight breaks out, and is stopped by the mother's (Abigail Clay) intervention. This forgotten quarrel brutally re-emerges during the final act of the celebration: the burning of the tar barrels. The two brothers and Scrub White start fighting again, this results in the death of the latter.

We have purposely not described the scene here; it is literally *indescribable*, insofar as it is the realisation – through the succession and length of the shots, abrupt changes of angle, play on distance, the reactions and the behaviour of the participants, the successive arrival of witnesses – of an amazing system of *deception* which affects all the characters implicated in the event, and blinds them as well as the spectator. The radical difference between Ford's procedure here, and other films of the enigma type, is that the latter, in order to be able to function and permit a solution to the enigma, must at first give the spectator only scraps of knowledge and deprive him of a number of clues, the revelation of which, after the event, will provide the solution to the plot; whereas here, on the contrary, everything is given, present, but undecipherable, and it can only be deciphered at the second, *informed*, look.

The system of deception here set up is effective because it *develops as the scene progresses*: all the characters are caught up in it and duped, thus making it more powerful; and the spectator witnessing these successive mystifications and called upon to agree with all, is thus the most deceived.

But we must also note that the effect of the deception continues and is *legitimised* by the substitution of a deceptive question: *which of the two brothers killed him?* for the real question: *who killed him?* The former question implies that the latter has already been answered, thus (successfully) suppressing the first: it will only be brought back by Lincoln (see 22).

All the different characters of the scene – *among them the spectator* – have either an active or a passive relationship to the deception – either way strengthening its influence. The spectator, who will be completely duped, is the initial witness of the fight: for him a perfectly plausible causal chain is constituted (except for one thing which we will specify): a cause of death: the shot; an effect: the wounded man's moans as he lies on the ground; reactions of the guilty: the two brothers, frightened, take refuge near their mother who has just arrived. There is only one element to contradict this causal chain: before hearing the shot, we see Scrub White's arm, which holds the weapon, turned away. But this element of confusion (Scrub White appearing to be seriously



wounded by his own weapon when it was pointed elsewhere) far from invalidates this first setting up of the deception; on the contrary it provokes distraction, thus permitting the intervention of a new factor (Cass's arrival) to pass almost unnoticed: the wounded man's death throes at this point can easily be accommodated by a classic typology: *dying-in-one's-best-friend's-arms*.

Cass, arriving during this break in attention, kneels down by his friend, placing himself *between him and the spectator* (long shot). He gets up in a *close up* shot, holding a bloody knife (a weapon which had not previously been seen); a shot which *independently of this drama* (as in Kuleshov's experiment) is *classically a shot of the guilty* (which is indeed what Cass is, since it is he who gave his friend this fatal knife wound but we will only learn this at the end of the movie, *even though all this has already been shown – but rendered not-readable*).

The two sons Adam and Matt behave, even before Cass's arrival (ever since the shot was fired) like guilty men. Cass saying 'He's dead' confirms them in this guilt, each one believes the other to be guilty but takes responsibility for the crime to protect his brother.

The mother intervenes when the shot is fired, and, seeing a man aground and her two sons alive but frightened, enters into the system of deception in her turn, believing them to be guilty. This feeling is strengthened when Cass gets up showing the knife, a knife which she recognises, believing then that she knows which of her two sons is guilty. But since they both accuse themselves, she plays the game and refuses to say which one she believes to be guilty (refusing to sacrifice one for the sake of the other). This refusal reinforces the deception because it accepts the displacement of the question: the mother thinks she keeps a secret, but it is the wrong one.

The spectator in his turn accepts this second causal chain: since the victim has been murdered with a knife by one of the two brothers, the gun shot from now on, appears to him as a trivial episode, even a digression.

Thus what is happening here is precisely the cinematic questioning of direct vision, of perception insofar as it conceals the structure. The work that needs to be done to make the scene legible is not a search for hidden meanings, but the bringing to light of the *meaning which is already there*: which is why paradoxically, it is our type of reading (see 1) of the film *in its entirety* which is called for and justified by this central scene.

This sequence and the preceding one (dialogue between the lovers) constitute, as we have already said, *a new fiction, from which Lincoln is absent*. He only comes into it when everything is decided (the crime committed, the accused taken away by the sheriff): neither actor, nor witness, *a priori* uninvolved in the problem, he *has no knowledge of it*. This is a necessary condition, in terms of

- 28 Lincoln's mythical role, for the truth to emerge by magical rather than scientific means; to solve this crime story situation Lincoln will use means very different from those of an enquiry along ordinary thriller lines.

### 16. The Lynching

(a) Introduced at the end of the celebration by the burning of the barrels (a commonplace episode in American celebrations, but here dramatically emphasised by the double fictional and historical context: KKK/fascist *auto-da-fés*), the cycle of violence (fight, crime) will culminate with the lynching. (The scene thereby acquires extra political significance because in the years 1925-35 a large number of lynchings took place in the USA – see films from that period, eg *Fury*). This violence carries with it an acceleration of the narrative: between the moment when the defendants are taken away and the one when the lynching starts, there are only a few seconds, the time of a reframing; during this time Lincoln offers his legal services to the mother. She asks who he is, since she doesn't recognise him as the man who once gave her credit (this is not without importance, see the circulation of the debts 19) whereas he has just recognised her as the woman who gave him the Book. He answers, after a pause, 'I'm your lawyer, ma'am'.

(b) Inside the prison, under attack from the lynchers, there is a violent contrast between the understandable nervousness of the defendants and the sheriff and the unjustifiable panic of Cass (who has just been promoted deputy sheriff); for the second time – and here again in a non-readable way – the film exposes Cass as the culprit, ie as the man who is afraid of being lynched.

(c) Lincoln's action, insofar as he represents Law, can only be the, if necessary violent, prohibition of any non-legal violence. Since the whole film is meant to manifest Lincoln's absolute superiority to all those who surround him, the scene of the lynching provides the opportunity for a masterly demonstration of it in a number of set scenes, each new stage of his victory increasing his castrating violence; this is inversely proportional to the expenditure of physical violence (since, in the ideological discourse, Law must have power insofar as it is legitimised by its own statement, not through physical strength, which is used as a last resort and often simply as a verbal threat). Here the escalation of legal repression is effected in many stages: 1. alone, Lincoln physically repels the lynchers' assault (courage and physical strength), 2. he incites one of the leaders to single combat, this the man evades (verbal threat based on knowledge of the opponent's weakness), 3. he defuses the crowd's anger by a cunning speech (so cunning, that the mother, not knowing *who he is* – ie in the fiction a good man, and in the myth President Lincoln – takes his speech literally and is very disturbed, before *believing* in him); he is also humorous (shifting to another level: complicity/familiarity with the crowd), 4. he

throws back on the crowd the threat of its own violence by showing it that each one of them one way or the other, could be lynched (intimidation producing terror), 5. addressing one individual amongst the lynchers, whom he knows to be a religious man, he threatens him with retribution in the name of the Bible (ultimate recourse to divine writing as an instance of the Law). Lincoln's castrating triumph is sanctioned in the film itself not only by the subsiding of the crowd's anger, but very precisely by the lowering of the tree trunk, which on Lincoln's order is dropped by the lynchers – who are dispersing. (Note that it is with this same tree trunk that the lynchers attempted to break open the prison door, protected by Lincoln's body).

### 17. The Dance

Invited by Mary Todd to a dance (the invitation card, congratulating him on his attitude in this 'recent deplorable uprising' says 'My sister invites you . . .': here again, denial of desire), Lincoln abandoning his boots, vigorously shines his black high button shoes, and with the same unusual concern to be smart cuts his hair (see the anecdote told by Eisenstein about the new President moving to Washington: 'he went as far as cleaning his own boots. Somebody said: *Gentlemen never clean their boots – And whose boots do real gentlemen clean?*'). The dance is in full swing, elegant and very genteel. Lincoln enters the lobby and is immediately surrounded by elderly gentlemen whom he entertains with funny stories (which we cannot hear). He is asked about his family ('Are you by any chance a member of the well-known Lincoln family from Massachusetts? – 'I'd say the evidence is against it if they own land'). Mary Todd responds absentmindedly to Douglas's advances, she is only interested in Lincoln. She goes to him and demands that he ask her to dance. He replies that he would very much like to dance with her, but warns her that he is a very poor dancer. He follows her to the middle of the dance floor, they start to dance a kind of waltz, then a polka, which Mary Todd suddenly interrupts and drags Lincoln to the balcony.

(a) The dance sequence is more or less compulsory in Ford's films. These dances almost always have the function first of setting up and ordering a ritual *miming ideal harmony* which in fact is far from regulating the relations of the social group; then later, to disturb, unmask and destroy this simulation of harmony by the intervention of a foreign element. Here Lincoln's social heterogeneity gives place to the realisation of his symbolic otherness (figure of the Law): this involves him (socially and sexually) in a seduction relationship which simultaneously *integrates and excludes him*; this causes a confusion which is not resolved dramatically, unlike what takes place in other Ford films (cf the dance in *Two Rode Together*, *Fort Apache* for example).

(b) The scandal of Lincoln's difference is even more noticeable

30 to the spectators than to the characters of the scene. First it is apparent at the *physical* level, his shape, size, gait, rigidity, his undertaker look (Lincoln's mythical costume), then, while he is dancing, in the lack of co-ordination and rhythm in his movements. On the other hand, the social difference (made clear in the scene where Lincoln is dressing for the dance), emphasised by the question about his family, is immediately defused of any political significance and deflected into an amiable originality (it is out of the question according to the film's ideological system, that his class origins should play anything but a positive role).

(c) But it is at the symbolic level that the scandal is most apparent. In terms of the logic of castration, Lincoln's status, whereas it is realised in the lynching scene in its active form (castrating action) figures here in the passive form: that of *inversion* (the fact that these two dimensions – the action of castrating/being castrated – belong together will be made obvious in the balcony scene). Indeed, Mary Todd fully takes the initiative. First she expresses her resentment at Lincoln's coldness (in her conversation with Douglas); then she accuses Lincoln of not making the first move, and demands that he dance with her; finally she brings the dance to a sudden halt and drags him out to the balcony. Thus if the dance scene signifies the hero's social recognition (reward), the dance with Mary Todd puts him into a real castration, the retroactive effect of the lynching scene (which already implied it logically, writing it into the unconscious of Ford's text). There the castrating action was made on the basis of a castration which becomes effective in the dance scene, and particularly in the balcony scene.

### 18. The Balcony

As soon as he is on the balcony, Lincoln is enchanted by the river. Mary Todd waits for a moment for Lincoln to speak or show some interest in her. Then she draws aside, leaving him alone in front of the river.

(a) Dance, balcony, river, moonlight, couple: all these elements create a romantic, intimate, sentimental atmosphere. The scene, however, mercilessly destroys this atmosphere (whose physical signifieds could be already read as more fantastic than romantic) to introduce the dimension of the Sacred.

(b) The transfer from one dimension to the other is effected by Lincoln's enchantment with the river: the commonplace accessory of the 'romantic scene' is shifted to an other scene and is at the same time the agent of this shift. An other scene (from which Mary Todd, having no place, withdraws) in which a process of displacement-condensation takes place so that the river simultaneously evokes the first woman Lincoln loved (Ann Rutledge) – an evocation here emptied of any nostalgic or sentimental character – and (see 11) the relationship Nature-Woman-Law. The river is here the ratification of Lincoln's contract with Law. Lincoln, faced with his

fate accepts it; the classic moment of any mythological story, where the hero sees his future written and accepts its revelation (the balcony, also a typical accessory of romantic love scenes, is here promoted, by Lincoln's gesture and the camera angle, to the anticipated role of the presidential balcony). Correlatively Lincoln's renunciation of pleasure is written here: from now on Ann Rutledge's death must be read as the real origin both of his castration and of his identification with the Law; and the 'inversion' of the dance scene as well as its relation to the lynching scene take on their true meaning: Lincoln does not have the phallus, he is the phallus (see Lacan '*La signification du phallus*').

### 19. The Family

Immediately after the lynching Lincoln accompanies the mother (Mrs Clay) and her two daughters-in-law back to their wagon. He tells her 'My mother would be just about your age if she were alive, you know she used to look a lot like you'. After the scene of the balcony and before the opening of the trial, he goes to visit the family. On his way to the Clay farm, as he passes the river again, his companion tells him 'I've never known a fella look at a river like you do; fella would think it was a pretty girl the way you carry on' (see 11, 18).

(a) The scene in the farm yard acts as a reminder: Lincoln fantasises himself in the role of son of the family. First, by chopping wood (see 14), he evokes the time when this was his daily task – and compares himself to the son of the family. Then, one by one all the elements of the scene remind him of his house, his garden, his trees, the members of his family; he himself asserts the sequence of these equivalences: Mrs Clay = his mother, Sarah = his dead sister, whose name was also Sarah, Carrie Sue = Ann Rutledge; and even the dish which is being cooked is his favourite dish: turnips. This insistant parallelism between the Lincoln family and the Clay family is carried through to the *absence* of the father: total exclusion in the case of Lincoln's father who is not even mentioned; the disappearance from the fiction of Mr Clay (present in the first scene) is explained by an 'accident'. The rejection of the Name of the Father logically corresponds to Lincoln's identification with the Law (his installation in the place of the great Other) which can neither guarantee itself nor originate itself through any other law than itself. We can here diagnose the *paranoia* which governs the symbolics of the film.

This reliving of memories also has the function of stressing Lincoln's social origins (see 9).

(b) This climate of nostalgic effusion – unique in the film – is brutally interrupted by one of Lincoln's fixed stares which can from now on be understood as the mark of his possession by Law. Giving up the role of son, he becomes inquisitor, interrupts the mother by asking her persistently which of her two sons is guilty.

32 Terrified she refuses to answer (as she had done earlier in front of the sheriff, and will do later in front of the prosecutor). Her consternation affects Lincoln and makes him immediately cast off this attitude of investigator; he gives up both trying to discover the mother's secret (but it is a useless secret) and separate the two sons (for the problematic of one or the other, he substitutes that of all or nothing) and once again symbolically takes their place beside the mother. Let us add that the film firmly avoids a possibility which could have been exploited: namely that the question of the choice between the two sons might upset Lincoln himself, make him doubt or worry for a moment: Lincoln is totally ignorant of the *lamma sabbachtani*.

(c) But this scene has the simultaneous function of continuing the circuit of debt and gift which links and will continue to link Lincoln and the mother, and of providing it with an *origin*: fictionally introduced by the exchange – unequal in Lincoln's favour – of the material for the Book (see 10), it seems at the symbolic level to go back to the time when the child 'used to stretch out while my mother read to me'; the situation is here reversed since Mrs Clay can't read and it is Lincoln – still paying off this debt of which Mrs Clay is unaware – who reads her the letter from her sons (note the way in which he pronounces the first words of this letter: 'Dear Ma').

The origin of Lincoln's knowledge is here given for the second time (see 11) as being feminine-maternal; the same equivalence Woman-Nature-(Mother)-Law is once again posed, the identification of Lincoln to the Law being related to the preliminary identification of the Law with Nature and Woman-Wife-Mother; the debt contracted by Lincoln towards his mother (she teaches him to read) as well as Mrs Clay (she gives the Book) and Ann Rutledge (she pushes him towards knowledge) can only be 'paid back' by his assumption of this mission, and his incarnation of the Law. Let us not insist on the assumptions behind this series (see 6), but notice that the circulation of the debt and its resolution are here enriched with an extra indicator: to answer, under the mother's dictation, the sons' letter, Lincoln asks Sarah for some paper, she gives him an almanac. Thus it is from the same family that Law and Truth originate: through the Book (the carrier of the Law) and the almanac: first used as a support for writing (letter from the mother to the imprisoned sons) it will reveal the truth when *exhibited by Lincoln* (see 22), it carries the solution to the enigma, it is the sign of Truth.

## 20. The Trial

(a) The trial, a classic feature of Hollywood cinema, represents the staging of American legalist ideology, and constitutes a microcosm of the social whole (sample of the different social strata represented by this or that type, this or that 'silhouette'); confidence in the

forms of legality is based precisely on this representativeness of the trial: it is America itself which constitutes the Jury, and who cannot be wrong, so that the Truth cannot fail to manifest itself by the end of the proceedings (carried out according to an almost ritualised alternation of comic and tragic moments). We have here a slight departure from this traditional trial, since the question is not to prove the culpability or the innocence of a defendant, but to *choose* (according to the principle of alternatives which has regulated the whole film) between two defendants. But here, as everywhere else, the constraints of the film's ideological strategy will compel Lincoln to *choose not to choose*, either (see 13) by deciding to re-establish the balance between the two parties, or (see 14) by indefinitely postponing the choice, or even, in the trial, by positively refusing to decide, thus trying to save both brothers, be it at the risk of losing both; all things which label and confirm Lincoln as a unifier and not a divider.

(b) During the different stages of the trial, Lincoln appears successively 1. As the weigher of souls: he quickly estimates the moral value of the members of the jury (and he does this according to norms which escape common understanding, even conventional morality: he accepts a man who drinks, lynches, loafs about, because by admitting to these faults, he manifests his deeper honesty). 2. As entertainer of the crowd (jokes, little stories, etc . . .) which put him in contrast with the prosecutor a starchy man of mean appearance. 3. As manifesting his castrating power over Cass, whom he immediately attacks without apparent reasons: intimidation, vicious interrogation, and totally displaced onomastic play on words, thundering looks: all these things imply a premonition of Cass's guilt on Lincoln's part, which is not to be backed up by any knowledge but is nonetheless the Truth. For throughout the film Lincoln relates not to knowledge, but to Truth (= Law). 4. As the spirit opposed to the word, the natural and/or divine Law to social Laws which are their more or less perfect transcription (he interrupts the prosecutor's cross-examination of the mother by telling him 'I may not know so much of Law, Mr Prosecutor, but I know what's right and what's wrong'). 5. As the righteous against the corridor filibusterer, morality against politics (ie his political opponent Douglas's asides with the prosecutor and with Cass).

(c) But this first day of the trial ends in a defeat for Lincoln, brought about by a sensational development: Cass's second testimony. From humanitarian concern, to save at least one of the two defendants he goes back on the first evidence he gave, and claims to have been an eye-witness of the murder (thanks to the moonlight) and points out the murderer: the elder of the two brothers. In the hermeneutic chain ('which one has killed?') this reversal of the situation introduces a deceptive answer. A new question is thus posed: how will Lincoln sort this one out, not only to win the trial, but also to remain faithful to his refusal to choose?

(a) As before any 'great crisis' in Hollywood cinema, there is a pause: the scene of the family vigil in the prison – whose function, in very classically codified form is to instil a sense of expectancy allowing a dramatic resurgence. Here the demands of this code (tension-relaxation-tension) are precisely fulfilled: no information is given which makes the drama progress (the family's communion in song replacing/forbidding all explanatory dialogue); it is a 'precarious situation lived through with serenity'. But the lack of any allusion on the part of the other members of the family to the guilt of the elder brother is itself sufficient to ratify Cass's accusations against him; the fact that it is not questioned – as if it presented no problem – seems to authenticate it.

In the duration of the scene, its adherence to the code seems perfect and even excessive: the convention is accepted and pushed to its extreme by the Fordian inscription (for everything which delineates the family group in Ford is grafted here), even to bestowing its character of strangeness on the scene (static frame, scenes shot from the front, strong light-dark contrasts, position of the characters, choir). But this adherence on repeated reading is revealed to be a deception. When we know that the real culprit is neither of the brothers, the absence of any discussion between them or with their family has the effect of a real *coup de force* at the price of which the miraculous dimension of Lincoln's revelation of the Truth is made possible. The scene is thus regulated – with great skill – by *the necessity of making the code* (the waiting period in which the group communes in silence or song – when words are useless, even improper) *responsible for the censorship of any information* about the defendants' innocence. If the scene is silent, it is because anything that might be intimated would inevitably have lifted the deception from the enigma and ruined the magic of Lincoln's act.

(b) The second part of this night of vigil starts, concerning Lincoln, on the same model: the hero's solitude and meditation before the decisive test. Lincoln is in his rocking chair by his office window, playing the Jew's harp. This isolation signifying his defeat is strengthened by two events: 1. Douglas and Mary Todd go past his window in a carriage; they both look at him condescendingly; Mary Todd turns away and says to Douglas: 'You were discussing your political plans Mr Douglas, please go on'. 2. The judge appears in Lincoln's office and arguing from his long experience, suggests a double compromise: to get help the next day from a more experienced lawyer (he suggests Douglas) and to agree to plead guilty to save the other brother. Lincoln categorically refuses: 'I'm not the sort of fella who can just swap horses in the middle of the stream'.

In 1. the change in size between the first long shot of the carriage and the close up when Mary Todd speaks, a trick of the direction which eliminates the 'real' distance by changing the axis (high



angle shot) and the width of the shot so that Lincoln appears to be right above the carriage, and Mary Todd's words cannot then fail to reach him, thanks to this unrealistic proximity – compel the viewer to interpret them as being addressed not to Douglas (Lincoln's eternal contrast) but to Lincoln, and their political contents *standing for* an erotic content. 'You were discussing your political plans Mr Douglas, please go on' can be read as 'I couldn't possibly do so with you Lincoln, *nor make love*' at a time when everything in Mary Todd's behaviour, look, and gestures points to her obvious spite, and to her speech as a denial of her desire. In the film's other scenes the repression taking place alternately between the erotic and the political (Law as repressed desire and as natural/divine morality) becomes here, in a single sentence, the repression of the erotic by the political.

In 2. Lincoln's paranoid features are confirmed: his refusal of all help, of any compromise, his hallucinatory faith in his own power, his certainty of being Chosen, his rigidity, the holding out to the bitter end.

## 22. Victory

Second day of the trial. Lincoln calls the main prosecution witness Cass back to the witness box, and by his questions makes him *repeat* his statement of the previous day point by point: it was in fact thanks to the full moon that he was able to witness the scene; it is to save one of the two brothers that he has gone back on his first statement. Mary Todd, like the rest of the public doesn't see the point of Lincoln's insistence to have things which are already known repeated. Lincoln pretends to let Cass go again, and just as he is about to leave the well of the Court, he suddenly asks him 'What d'you have against Scrub White, what did you kill him for?' Pulling the almanac out of his hat he thrusts it forward, saying: 'Look at page 12: see what it says about the moon; it says it was in it's first quarter and set at 10.21 pm, forty minutes before the murder' and, addressing Cass, 'You lied about this point, you lied about the rest'. From this point onwards Lincoln harasses Cass with questions until, collapsing; in a broken, shrill voice, he confesses: 'I didn't mean to kill him . . .' The confession obtained, Lincoln casually turns away from his victim and, addressing the prosecutor: 'Your witness', while Cass's former supporters surround him threateningly.

(a) The almanac: a *signifier* first present in the scenes where the mother asks Lincoln to write to her imprisoned sons for her (see 19) as a simple support for writing, reappears on the first day of the trial (where it is on Lincoln's table, near his hat), then in the night scene where Lincoln is fingering it with apparent casualness. It is finally produced as *sign* of the Truth at the end of the second day of the trial, when Lincoln pulls it out of his hat like a conjuror.

36 We have here the typical example of a signifier running through the film without a signified, representing nothing, acquiring the status of a sign under Lincoln's revelation (the almanac representing proof of the truth for everyone) *but without ever having been an indicator*. Thus the thriller process of deduction is *completely eliminated* in favour of a scriptural logic which demands that such a signifier be produced as a veiled term whose very concealment and sudden final revelation would constitute a *mise en scène* inseparable from the meaning it induces, the mark of the unconscious determination of its writing into Ford's text. Veiled 1 in the extent to which it realises the operation of repression of (erotic/criminal) violence in the fiction, whose return is effected according to a rhetoric of negation, and 2 because its only *place* is that of a term whose sole function is to effect a mediation (between the criminal and the crime, between the mother and the sons, it is thereby doomed to disappearance as it is produced and to be included/excluded from the propositions in which it is actualised, by the very fact that it determines the production of their meaning; this is so to the extent to which the *signifier* of truth must remain veiled as long as truth is not stated, since at no moment is it presented as a clue (which would imply a work, the exercise of a knowledge, even a manipulation, which is not the case here). Lincoln's powers are thus not presented as the exercise of the art of detective deduction, but as a paranoid interpretation which short-circuits its process. Thus the proof of the crime seems to be materialised by the mere faculty which Lincoln has of producing the signifier as the concrete result of his omnipotent powers of Revelation.

But the manifestation of this omnipotence at the end of the film, made necessary by the ideological project (Lincoln, a mythical hero representing Law and guarantor of Truth), takes place at the end of the series of relations of co-presence between Lincoln and the almanac (three scenes where it is present without Lincoln knowing what to do with it in terms of the truth) and in such an unlikely and arbitrary (magical) way that it can be read in the following ways: 1 effectively as omnipotence, 2 as a pure fictional *coup de force* implying an imposition of Ford's writing on Lincoln's character (Lincoln's omnipotence is then *controlled and limited* by Ford's omnipotence, the latter not adopting the best possible viewpoint on his character, which would have been to show him as himself having the revelation of the Truth, and not merely as its agent) and 3 as Lincoln's *impotence* insofar as he appears subject to the power of the signifier (the almanac) and in a position of radical non-recognition regarding it, such that one can just as well say that the truth revolves around Lincoln (and not Lincoln around the truth) and that is not Lincoln who uses the signifier to manifest the truth, but the signifier which uses Lincoln as mediator to accede to the status of the sign of truth. 2 and 3 (one specific to the film's writing, the other to its reading: but as we have stated in

the introduction, we do not hesitate to force the text, even to rewrite it, insofar as the film only constitutes itself as a text by integration of the reader's knowledge) *manifest a distortion of the ideological project by the writing of the film.*

(b) Once the truth is revealed, Lincoln harasses Cass with brutal questions until he obtains his confession. 1. Lincoln must obtain from the culprit the confirmation of what he has just stated to be truth; on the one hand to finalise the fiction (save the two brothers, solve the mystery: but at the same time, this solution is the admission that the enigma was in fact, a mere deception set up by the film); and on the other hand to be confirmed in the eyes of the other characters as possessor of the truth (if it is in fact enough for the spectator – who knows who Lincoln is – to see him reveal the truth to believe it, the characters of the fiction, his enemies, those who have witnessed his failure of the previous day, etc . . . cannot be so easily satisfied with his word). 2. Lincoln's insistence and violence at this moment can read, first, as the classic harshness of rampant Justice, but mainly as the culmination of Lincoln's castrating power (see 16), which is attested by the fact that Cass, around whom the whole film has accumulated the clichés of hyper-virility, collapses in tears when he confesses, crying like a child. 3. This excessive violence of the characterisation of Lincoln in the writing of the film, which is motivated neither by the needs of Lincoln's cause (he could triumph without terror) nor by those of the fiction (Cass could confess without resisting) shows an imbalance with the idealised figure of Lincoln: even if this violence in the writing implies no intentional criticism of the character Lincoln, it makes visible – by its own scriptural excesses – the truly repressive dimension of the figure which this writing dictates, and deroutes what could have been edifying or hagiographic in the ideological project of the film.

### 23. 'Towards his destiny'

After his victory, Lincoln leaves the court alone. Four people are waiting for him, among them Mary Todd and Douglas. She congratulates him, looking at him seductively. Douglas then comes to shake his hand: 'I give you my sincere promise never to make the mistake of underrating you again'. Lincoln replies: 'Neither of us will underrate each other again'. He is about to go but is called back 'The town's waiting'. He moves towards the door, fully lit, and the crowd can be heard applauding off-set.

Victorious, Lincoln is *recognised* by those who doubted him: this type of scene (recognition of the hero) belongs to a very classic register. But the way in which the scene is filmed, the camera at a slightly low angle shot, disposition of the groups, Lincoln's rather weary solemnity, the tone in which he is called ('the town's waiting') and chiefly, when he goes to the threshold, his entry into a beam of violent light, the frontal low angle shot when he faces the

38 crowd whom he greets by removing his hat, the very harsh lighting of the end of this scene, all set this sequence in a very specifically theatrical dimension: congratulations backstage after the performance, recall to the stage of the prima donna. But the fact that, by spatial displacement, this *encore* takes place not in the court in front of the spectators of the trial, but on another stage (the street, the town, the country) and in front of a crowd *which is not shown* (which is no longer only the inhabitants of Springfield but of America) retroactively shows the performance of the trial (definitely given as theatrical by the entrances, the recalls, the repeats, the attitude of the spectators, the wings, etc) to be a simple rehearsal (provincial tour) and what is to follow on the other stage (which the whole film has played on as something having already happened which no one could be ignorant of) will be the real performance (national tour); and the *encore* is, in fact, the true entrance on the stage of the legend. At the moment when he is *discovered* (intercepted) by the others as Lincoln, and stripped of his character, he can only act it out, play his own role. This interception is very precisely indicated in the film by the violent call of the brilliant light: the reference to German expressionism (even to horror films: *Nosferatu*) – much admired by Ford, as we well know – is therefore compulsory at this point.

(b) Preceding the film's last shots which will only serve to heighten this tragic dimension, we have the scene of farewell to the Clays; like all other scenes with the family (as a function of its status in relation to Lincoln) it is treated in an intimate, familiar way, without solemnity. A scene in which the fiction will terminate the double circuit of the symbolic debt linking Lincoln to Mrs Clay and of the desire which drives Carrie Sue (as we have seen she is a substitute for Ann Rutledge) towards a Lincoln who can no longer love her; first the mother insists on paying Lincoln and gives him a few coins which he accepts, saying: 'Thank you ma'am it's mighty generous of you'; then Carrie Sue leaps to his neck and kisses him, saying: 'I reckon I'd just about die if I didn't kiss you Mr Lincoln'. This confirms everything in Carrie Sue's attitude, which already exceeded the simple feeling of gratitude towards Lincoln, showing her to be driven by the desire which throughout the film, makes her 'play' around him, thus allowing her kiss to be read as a form of 'acting out', a substitute for orgasm.

(c) Final scene: Lincoln takes leave of his companion (who is simultaneously a classic theatrical confidant and a sort of Sancho Panza, who is at his side in a number of scenes in the film) by telling him 'I think I might go on apiece . . . maybe to the top of that hill'. The confidant goes out of frame. A storm threatens. Lincoln is slowly climbing the hill. A last shot shows him facing the camera, with a vacant look, while threatening clouds cross the background and the 'Battle Hymn of the Republic' begins to be heard. Lincoln leaves the frame. Rain begins to fall violently and

continues into the final shot of the film (his statue at the Capitol) while music intensifies. 39

Here again, it is the excesses of Ford's writing (accumulation of signs of the tragic, of ascent: hill – mythical reference –, storm, lightning, rain, wind, thunder, etc) which by overlaying all the clichés, underlines the monstrous character of the figure of Lincoln: he leaves the frame and the film (like *Nosferatu*) as if it had become impossible for him to be filmed any longer; *he is an intolerable figure*, not because he has become too big for any film on account of the ideological project but rather because the constraints and violences of Ford's writing, having exploited this figure for their own ends and manifested its excessive and monstrous dimensions, have no further use for it and so return it to the museum.

#### 24. Work of the Film

With the fiction reaching saturation point here, what culminates in the final sequence is nothing other than the effects of meaning, re-scanned by our reading through the film as a whole, taken to their extreme. That is: the unexpected results (which are also contrary in relation to the ideological project) produced by the inscription – rather than flat illustration – of this project within a cinematic texture and its treatment by a writing which, in order to carry through the project successfully, maximising its value *and only that* (it's obvious that Ford takes practically no distance in relation to the figure and the ideology of Lincoln) is led to: such distortions (the setting up of a system of deception); such omissions (all those scenes, necessary in the logic of the crime thriller but whose presence could have lessened the miraculous dimension of Lincoln's omnipotence: the confrontation with the accused, the least one could expect of a lawyer); such accentuations (the dramatisation of the final scenes); such scriptural violence (be it for the repression of violence – the lynching, the trial); such a systematisation of determination and election (throughout a film which at the same time wants to play on a certain suspense and free choice without which the fiction could neither develop nor capture interest); in short to such a *work* that today simply delimiting its operation and the series of means it puts into action allows us to see the price at which such a film could be made, the effort and detours demanded to carry the project through.

And which Jean-Pierre Oudart in the following conclusion, the point of departure of our study, cannot but repeat.

#### 25. Violence and Law

I. A discourse on the Law produced in a society which can only represent it as the statement and practice of a moralist prohibition of all violence, Ford's film could only reassert all the idealist representations which have been given it. Thus it is not very difficult to extract from it an ideological statement which seems to valorise

40 in all innocence the ascetic rigour of its agent, making it into the unalterable value which circulates throughout the film from scene to scene; it is also easy to observe that this cliché, presented as such in the film and systematically accentuated, is not there merely to ensure the acceptability of the Fordian inscription. Without this cliché which provides the fiction with a kind of metonymic continuity (the same constantly re-asserted figure) – whose necessity is moreover overdetermined, its function being more than simply setting up a character whose ‘idealism’ can most conveniently be signified by the external signs of the very puritan sense of election – the film would appear, in fact does appear in spite of it, to be a text of disquieting unintelligibility; through its constant disconnections, it places us in a forced position for the reading and in fact its comprehension demands:

(1) That one first take no account of this at once insistent and fixed statement;

(2) That one listens carefully to what is stated in the succession of so obviously ‘Fordian’ scenes which support this statement, and in the relations between the figures, all more or less part of the Fordian fiction, which constitute these scenes;

(3) That one tries to determine how all these are involved; ie to discover what the operation by which Ford inscribes this character into his fiction consists of, insofar as, despite appearances, it is not superimposed on Ford’s ‘world’, does not traverse it like a foreign body, but finds through this inscription into his fiction a designated place as representative of his Law; for the film maker promotes the character to the role to which his (legendary) historical referent destines him only at the price of his subjection to the (Fordian) fictional logic. This determined his entry there in advance insofar as his role was already written and his place already set out in Ford’s fiction. The work of Ford’s écriture only becomes apparent in this film through the problem involved in producing the character in this role, in that he took a place which was already occupied.

II. It is the character of the mother that incarnates the idealised figure of Ideal Law in Ford’s fiction. Moreover, it is often, as in *Young Mr Lincoln*, the widowed mother, guardian of the deceased father’s law. It is for her that the men (the regiment) sacrifice the cause of their desire, and under her presidency that the Fordian celebration takes place; this in fact consists in a simulacrum of sexual relations from which all effective desire is banned. But it is in the constantly renewed relationship of this group with another (the Indians), in the dualism of Ford’s universe that the inscription of the structural imperative of Law which dictates the deferment of desire and imposes exchange and alliance is realised, in violence, guided by the mediating action of the hero (often a bastard) who is placed at its intersection.

III. In *Young Mr Lincoln* one of the results of using a single

character for both roles, is that he will have both their functions, which will inevitably create, by their interference and their incompatibility (insofar as one secures the taboo on the violence of desire, the other is agent of its inscription), disturbances, actions which oppose the order of Ford's world, and it is remarkable that each comical effect always shows them up (there is no film in which laughter is so precisely a sign of a constant disorder of the universe). The compression of their functions will in fact be used only on the one level of the castration of the character (signified at the ideological level by its puritan cliché, and at the same time written, in the unconscious of the text, as the effect of the fictional logic on the structural determination of the character) and of his castrating action, in a fiction ruled by Ideal Law alone since the dualism of Ford's world is abandoned in favour of the mass-individual opposition. (In fact the political conflict intervenes only as a secondary determination of the fiction and literally only acts backstage). In fact, we see that:

(1). The character's calling originates in his renouncing the pleasures of love, it is strengthened because he resists its attraction: Lincoln becomes so well integrated in the fiction and is so vigilant against the violences and plots which take place there only because he refuses to give in to the advances constantly made to him by women, affected by a charm which is due only to the prestige of his castration.

(2). This extreme postponement of the hero's desire soon becomes meaningful since it permits him to become the restorer of Ideal Law, whose order has been perturbed by a crime which the Mother has not been able to prevent but which she will attempt to stifle.

This shows that:

(1). The puritan cliché which Ford emphasises has the very precise function of promoting the character to his role as mediator, insofar as the pleasure which he rejects allows him to thwart any attempt at sexual and political corruption; it thus simultaneously guarantees the credibility of the figure of Lincoln and the position of the character as the figure of Ideal Law in Ford's fiction. At the obvious price of installing him within a castration, whose comical aspects Ford uses sufficiently to indicate how indifferent he is to producing an edifying figure, and how much more attentive he is to the disturbing results of its presence in the fiction: for example in the dance scene in which his character perturbs the harmony, where the agent of Law behaves like a kill-joy, thus making visible what the harmony of the Fordian celebration would conceal.

(2). The fact that the character literally takes the place of the Mother, ie takes on simultaneously her ideal position and her function (since he assumes responsibility for her children, and promises to feed them well in the new home which the prison becomes) gives rise to a curious transformation of the figure, as this repetition of

42 roles is effected under the sign of a secret which the Mother must (believes she does) keep to try to prevent any violence – even, inconceivably, that of the Ideal Law which she incarnates – against her children; and by thus incubating the crime she projects her role into a quasi erotic (almost Hitchcockian) dimension never presented as such by Ford, since usually the fiction protects her from any relationship with the crime (since it is part of her function to be ignorant of violence). This is comically reintroduced in the final scene of the trial, when the real proof (an almanac on a sheet of which should have been written the letter of love which Lincoln was planning to write for her, only to lull her attention and extract confessions from her) is pulled out of Lincoln's hat; it was necessary for the re-establishment of Law that by the end of the trial a signifier (the proof of the crime) be produced whose very occultation renders it erotic; and that it must necessarily be produced by the figure of Law to fit into the fictional logic since it is from this ideal Law that originated the cancellation of the criminal act in the fiction, the statement of the taboo on violence (on pleasure), the position of the Mother as the figure of forbidden violence (pleasure), the possession of the phallus by this figure (as a signifier of this pleasure) and the production, of the proof of the crime as if it were a phallic signifier obviously proceeding from the same statement. In such fictions this usually means, either that the weapon, the trace of the crime, acts like a letter which Law must decipher, since its very proscription has written it, or that the confession be produced by the criminal as a return of the repressed in an erotic form. The two results are here compressed, Law producing the proof of the crime (the writing which reveals the murderer) as if it were a phallic object which Ford's comedy presents like the rabbit pulled out of the conjuror's hat; the improbable levity with which Ford brings the trial to its close really can only be read as a masking effect which conceals to the end the 'human' context, thus allowing the logic of the inscription to produce this gag as its ultimate effect, a final consequence of Lincoln's re-enactment of the Mother's role, a fantastic return of the mask.

IV. The fact that the overdetermination of this inscription of the Lincoln figure, as agent of the Law, in Ford's fiction by all the idealised representations of Law and its effects produced by the bourgeoisie, far from having been erased by Ford, has been declared by his writing and emphasised by his comedy, shows what a strange ideological balancing act the film-maker has insisted on performing, and what strange scriptural incongruities he has insisted on exploiting; to the extent that by the fictional constraints he gave himself, by giving up the usual bisection of his fiction and the sometimes truly epic inscription of Law thereby articulated (which recalls Eisenstein in *The General Line*) he could only produce the



Law as a pure prohibition of violence, whose result is only a permanent indictment of the castrating effects of its discourse. Indeed to what is the action of his character reduced if not hitting his opponents at their weakest point – weaknesses which Ford always perversely presents as being capable of provoking a deadly laughter? So that the sole but extreme violence of the film consists of verbal repression of violence which, in certain scenes (the unsuccessful lynching) is indicated as really being a death sentence, a mortal interdict which has no equivalent except maybe in Lang and which shows the distance Ford, or rather his writing, keeps between himself and the idealist propositions which he uses.

V. For, with a kind of absolute indifference to the reception given to his stylistic effects, the film-maker ends by practising stubbornly a scriptural perversion which is implied by the fact that, paradoxically, in a film meant to be the Apology of the Word, the last word is always given to the iconic signifier, entrusted by Ford with the production of the determining effects of meaning. And as in this film what is to be signified is always either the (erotic, social, ideological) separation of the hero relative to his surroundings, or the immeasurable distance between him and his actions, or the absence of any common denominator between the results he obtains and the means he uses, and those obtained by his opponents (insofar as he holds the privilege of the castrating speech) Ford succeeds, by the economy of means which he uses to that effect – his style forbidding him the use of effects of implicit valorisation of the character which he could have drawn from an 'interiorised' writing – in simultaneously producing the same signifier in completely different statements: (for example in the moonlight scene, where the moonlight on the river indicates at the same time the attempted seduction, the past idyll, and the hero's 'idealist' vocation); or even in renewing the same effect of meaning in totally different contexts (the same spatial disconnections of the character used in the dance scene and the murder scene). So that the intention of always making sense, of closing the door to any implicit effect of meaning, of constantly re-asserting these same meanings, in fact results – since to produce them the film-maker always actualises the same signifiers, sets up the same stylistic effects – in constantly undermining them, turning them into parodies of themselves. (With Ford parody always proceeds from a denunciation of the writing by its own effects.) The film's ideological project thus finds itself led astray by the worst means it could have been given to realise itself (Ford's style, the inflexible logic of his fiction) mainly to the benefit of a properly scriptural projection (obtained not by the valorisation after the event of previously constituted effects of meaning, but proceeding directly from the inscription, produced anew and resolved in each scene, of the character in Ford's fiction) of the effects of the repression of violence: a violence whose repres-

- 44 sion, written thus turns into exorcism, and gives to its signifiers, in the murder and the lynching scenes, a fantastic contrast which contributes considerably to the subversion of the deceptively calm surface of the text.

### Notes

1. This usage of inscription (*l'inscription*) refers to work done by Jacques Derrida on the concept of *écriture* in *Theorie d'ensemble* (Collection Tel Quel, 1968) which will be taken up in a future issue of *Screen*. *Cahiers* point here is that all individual texts are part of and inscribe themselves into one historically determined 'text' (*l'histoire textuelle*) within which they are produced; a reading of the individual text therefore requires examining both its dynamic relationship with this general text and the relationship between the general text and specific historical events.

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translated by Helen Lackner and Diana Matias

### Afterword

There are two points I would like to make about John Ford's film *Young Mr Lincoln*, in addition to those made in the *Cahiers du Cinema* editorial article, without wishing to pass judgement on the value of the reading they undertake – a psycho-analytic reading which owes its concepts to the work of Jacques Lacan – beyond affirming its evident interest.

#### 1. *The Civil War*

Everybody knows that the major event in Lincoln's life was the American Civil War, in which he led the North to victory. Yet this event is apparently completely absent from the film, except for one brief and somewhat cryptic allusion to Southern slavery. It might be thought that this absence was simply due to chronology – the film stops at a point in Lincoln's life before the Civil War begins. I do not believe this to be the case. In fact, I think the Civil War is present, but in disguised form, implicit rather than explicit.

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The *Cahiers* writers correctly point out that the film operates with a binary structure, posing a series of alternatives. Let us look at one of these alternatives: the pie-judging. During the Fourth of July celebrations, Lincoln is asked to choose between two slices of pie. Unable to choose, he tastes first one, then the other, proclaiming each in turn excellent, until they have both been completely devoured. Clearly, this is a gag, a light-hearted interpolation into the narrative. However, it is also, I think, an allusion to the Civil War and the view expressed by Lincoln is not simply that both slices of pie are good, but that both sides in the Civil War, North and South, are good: Lincoln, the bringer of unity rather than division.

Indeed, the pie episode, trivial though it may seem, is not isolated. The whole plot hinges around the calamity that has befallen two brothers, each encouraged to think the worst of each other, yet refusing to follow the path of fratricidal strife. Lincoln, just as he believes in the excellence of both pies, believes in the innocence of both brothers. Again, in the early sequence of the quarreling Mormons there is the same emphasis on preventing fratricidal strife (the Mormons call each other 'brother') and the equal claim of both sides to the dispute, which the *Cahiers* writers comment on.

This emphasis on the unitary rather than divisive role of Lincoln (leaving aside its historical accuracy) might seem difficult to maintain throughout the long courtroom sequences, which take up most of the second part of the movie. By their nature, court-rooms are arenas for struggle and winner-take-all competition. Lincoln, however, is not presented as a lawyer in the usual sense at all. It is extremely important to note that truth is established not by the adjudication of the jury (despite the care taken by Lincoln in selecting jury-members) but by the confession of the true murderer, a confession obtained by Lincoln through the force of his cross-examination.

It is necessary that the truth should be spoken in this way. Lincoln's efforts are not directed towards presenting a case or swaying the jury. Like a missile with a homing device, he homes in on the lies he senses and explodes them. Truth, for Lincoln (Ford, ideology) is essentially subjective: honest men speak the truth. Consequently, the way to truth is through moral judgment rather than forensic skill. The fixed stare which the *Cahiers* writers stress so heavily is not simply 'castrating' (Karl Abraham, pertinently, interprets the fixed stare as phallic, as a symbol of rape) but also indicates Lincoln's gift as a seer, who can see not simply the outside (appearances may deceive) but the inside, the heart itself.

Lincoln, in fact, like God, is able to see J Palmer Cass's inmost thoughts: he knows Cass is guilty, because of his powers of moral vision. Lincoln lives in a world of natural essence: hence, his unease in the world of social appearance which Douglas inhabits. Lincoln's

46 power as a lawyer rests on his ability to strip away the false facade that Palmer Cass has erected. Lincoln, unlike Cass, can see what no-one else can see: under his fixed stare, it is always moonlight. The fact that Lincoln, alone among the major characters, is absent from the murder scene – not a witness – simply strengthens the point that he knows the truth through his superior vision – he has witnessed the moral qualities of the pioneer family and that suffices.

Lincoln's virtue resides in his closeness to the natural essence which supposedly is within us all. His role in the trial is fundamentally religious – his contact with truth is on a sacred rather than secular level. Hence he is able to solve the problem of justice posed in the movie: on the one hand, the popular, direct justice of the mob; on the other hand, the artificial, elitist, mumbo-jumbo of the courts, embodied in the lawyer for the prosecution. Lincoln's victory in the court underscores his victory on the steps of the jail – he defeats both the lynch-mob and the orotund counsel in their efforts to execute the innocent brothers. Distrust of the aristocracy is paralleled by distrust of the urban masses: the movie's populism is based on the independent rural yeomanry of homesteaders. It is a classical petit-bourgeois populism.

## 2. *Lincoln's Mother*

*Young Mr Lincoln* falls into the same pattern as many other Ford films: it is constructed around the drama of a family threatened with dissolution. The mother holding the family together is a recurrent figure in Ford movies – *The Grapes of Wrath* provides another obvious example. At the same time, the hero, Lincoln, is a man without a family – an orphan and a bachelor. The crucial turning-point in his life is his decision, at Ann Rutledge's grave, to leave his native village and try to make his way in the world – he sets out on his wanderings like Ransom Stoddard in *Liberty Valance* with just his books and his determination to put up his lawyer's shingle. Here we get the typical tension between domestic life and vagrancy which marks Ford's films.

At the same time, however, Lincoln has a nostalgia for family life: hence his identification with the pioneer family – as the *Cahiers* writers point out, he sees all its members as analogues of his own family and himself falls into the role of eldest son. In fact, it is by re-uniting the family which is symbolically his own, that Lincoln makes the decisive step which takes him on the road, not just from village to town, but from Illinois to Washington. Lincoln is able to follow his own solitary course because in a symbolic sense, he is one of the family. (Mary Todd's role, I think, as future wife is marginal to the film – she acts as little more than a barometer indicating the changed fortunes of Lincoln and Douglas. It is clear that Lincoln's true love – unconsummated, lost for ever – was his love for Ann Rutledge).

The bachelor with an unconsummated lost love is a recurrent

figure in Ford: Ethan Edwards in *The Searchers* for instance. The graveyard scene in *Young Mr Lincoln* offers a particularly clear example of introjection of the lost object leading to a regression of libido into the ego and consequent strengthening of narcissism. However, Ann Rutledge should be distinguished from Lincoln's mother more clearly than is done in the *Cahiers* article. Lincoln, in fact, introjects aggression from Ann Rutledge – leaving the village. Typically, with Ford, the unmarried young woman still has 'phallic' characteristics and has to be castrated – publicly humiliated – before marriage. (This humiliation often takes the form of physical assault: *The Quiet Man*, *Donovan's Reef*, etc). If violence is repressed in Lincoln – or, at any rate, displaced on to rail-splitting, wood-chopping, etc – this is more likely because of guilt at a parricide accomplished in phantasy: as the *Cahiers* writers point out, there is a mysterious absence of fathers in the movie. This, of course, connects with the fascination of the mother for Lincoln, his infantile vision of himself as a 'son', his gratitude for the gift he receives from the mother, and so on.

Finally, Lincoln's narcissism should be related to the importance of the 'public' in the movie: at the election meeting, at the Fourth of July celebration, at the trial. The presence of the 'public' of course also has the function of establishing a link between the narrative level of the movie and the level of its presentation to the audience – there is a 'public' on screen and off screen in the cinema. As the *Cahiers* writers point out, this is an essential feature of Lincoln's first utterance – 'You all know who I am, I am plain Abraham Lincoln' – which is directed towards addressees on two different levels. Beyond this, however, it also establishes Lincoln's own role as a monologist – the only real dialogue he has in the movie is with Ann Rutledge, the rest are all cross-examinations or interrogations in which the addressee in reply simply, as it were, fills in the lacunae in Lincoln's own monologue.

Lincoln does not need to enter into dialogue with the crowd precisely because he speaks for them, ie for their true selves. This is particularly clear, of course, in the lynch sequence. And the same kind of suppression of dialogue is at work, of course, with Ford himself. The only questioning Ford allows Lincoln is questioning to draw out the truth from others – the truth which is in them but had somehow been covered over. Lincoln, however, speaks the truth naturally – he is a kind of priest who articulates the truth of nature, the divine truth. We – the public – are expected to recognise this truth when we hear it, first in Lincoln, then in ourselves. This is the fundamental ideological operation of Ford's film.

PETER WOLLEN

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In his *Screen* article 'Dickens and Hitchcock'<sup>1</sup>, Edward Buscombe suggests links between the two artists; one can acknowledge the suggested links without finding them exhaustive enough to constitute a substantial affinity. Links of that general kind can be established between nineteenth-century writers and directors in the commercial cinema without ever scratching the surface of the question of what more profound links there might be between individual and individual. While Hitchcock's paternity (so far as one can be discerned) in the cinema is in German expressionism, in literature one can demonstrate his closeness to Joseph Conrad. Not, it must be said immediately, that the latter connection is simply that Hitchcock adapted 'The Secret Agent' (as *Sabotage*). Indeed, that adaptation could well be used to demonstrate the considerable contrast with Conrad since the film takes merely the skeleton of Conrad's tale, divesting it of the enveloping, gloomily funny irony which in that novel is Conrad's instrument for subjecting his characters to a comprehensive vision and for maintaining an impersonal control and unity. By the time he made *Sabotage*, Hitchcock had found his own characteristic methods and structures, and they are not, but are related to, Conrad's.

In *Politics and the Novel*<sup>2</sup> Irving Howe describes Conrad as 'a Tory with repressed affinities for anarchism'. Howe stresses 'the sense of repression' in Conrad, who, he says, 'violently resists the demonic and the sensual.' Howe doesn't understand Conrad's detachment, calling it a 'safe distance', and nor does he know how to cope with Conrad's honesty:

By straining his will, he suppresses the chaos within him; but it breaks past his guard in the shape of a free-floating anxiety, a sense that the universe is – not actively malicious, which might even be consoling, but – permanently treacherous and ominous.<sup>3</sup>

There is an accurate perception in this, but it seems wrong to suppose that this thematic material 'breaks past his guard'; it seems, rather, to be quite consciously present. Howe's idea that anarchism in Conrad's novel is 'a projection of an unrevealed self' is unnecessarily circuitous, and superficial. In Conrad, as in Hitchcock, political and other kinds of subversion are seen primarily as a *disorder*, which the novelist and the director react against but which they feel themselves compelled to deal with in their work. The theme becomes fully articulated in Hitchcock's thirties films, especially in *The Man Who Knew Too Much* and *Sabotage*, and is

52 one sign of a quite sudden arrival at a native style: taut and intricate as well as what it already was – devoted to the relative manoeuvring of order and disorder within a classical framework.

In his *Screen* article Edward Buscombe notes that Hitchcock's intricate plotting is to impose order on the irrationalities released by creative activity. It will be seen that this is related to Irving Howe's view, just quoted, of Conrad and the tensions in that novelist of conservatism and anarchism. Hitchcock's English films allow us to see this as thematic material, in several guises: it is, fundamentally, a question of individualism – exploring and disciplining it, suggesting its place, and (sometimes) finally placing it.

In a national cinema notable for its lack of success in world markets, Hitchcock was a remarkable exception, and that was the basis, of course, for his eventually being welcomed in Hollywood. But to use the commercial cinema, and in particular to use it supremely well, already implies much of a director: centrally his submission of himself to an ordered, traditional framework. Since this will inevitably be a characteristic of his work, it will also be present thematically (the work presenting an image of itself) – in the form already mentioned, of the place and placing of individuality. To be properly 'commercial' in the cinema also implies an international audience, rather than a simply national one: Hitchcock was quite clearly influenced by the German silent cinema, and drew on British literary sources and on the narrative methods of the American cinema; but his aptitude for the commercial cinema suggests more fundamental reasons than those for his ability to draw wide audiences. An impersonal style (I refer to that kind of artistic impersonality manifested in classicism, narrative discipline and stylistic homogeneity) already implies impersonality as thematic content, a submission of every character and event to a common level of being, and their common accession to an undisturbed unity which is the director's comprehensive vision. If this is achieved, as it is in Hitchcock, with lucidity and vigour, it is immediately recognisable by audiences not simply as referring to their own experience, but as offering a tool for their own structuring of their experience. This kind of comprehensive vision always offers itself authoritatively as being capable of coping with *all* experience; it presents itself thus by reducing a particular narrative content to its essentials in the light of the particular director's sense of what is fundamental. Classic narrative cinema always portrays life as meaningful, and as having qualities which (within each individual film) do not change and are always operative. In order to present a comprehensive vision, it has to present the universe as stable and homogeneous. If a film of this kind deals for instance with evil, even if in the course of the narrative the evil is defeated, it is nevertheless affirmed as a part of the film's unity, which is the film's particular sense of life. If it depicts instability, that too is presented as an element in a stable, finally hospitable universe.

*The Pleasure Garden* was his first completed film as sole director. As in so many of his English films, the theatre is a dominant image, which here provides a simple method to separate individuals (the performers) from a mass (the audience) – in this case, also it separates girls from the men for whom they perform. Women in Hitchcock frequently embody separateness and distinctness: the situation in which they find themselves is then capable of being interpreted as an expression of their own inner being. There always is present in Hitchcock this sense of an interior drama: in this case it works through the splitting of characters into qualities, and issues finally in an accession of self-limitation, mainly on the part of its central character, Patsy. Her strengths are evident from the start, as well as is her willing of a routine artificiality. She takes pity on an innocent, Jill, who turns out to be a gold-digger and who eventually, cruelly, humiliates her protectress. Jill is the unbridled individualism which has tempted Patsy but which she hasn't dared express: in her depression Patsy marries Levet, the weaker friend of Jill's fiancé, so compounding the connection between the two girls. Patsy and Jill form a unity (an image for which is their respective masculine and feminine characteristics). Jill pursues her social ambition while Patsy is brought low. The action moves to an unspecified place in the colonial 'East', the setting for the unravelling of the connection between the girls, expressed through the relationships of the two men (Levet and Hugh, Jill's fiancé) to Patsy. Hugh's disappointment in Jill is followed by his succumbing to a fever, in which he mistakes Patsy for Jill. Haunted by his own misdeeds, Levet tries to kill Patsy, but is himself killed. This *leaves* Patsy and Hugh: I put it this way to stress the absolute lack of conscious choice on their part, and their submission to the development. The two characters have each been 'split' into two, but have finally divested themselves, or have been divested by life, of their 'other' halves, which were also their elements of self-assertion, cruelty, evil and madness. It is on those elements that the film's structure rests; they drive the film forward, dragging the main characters in their wake, and when finally both Jill and Levet have disappeared from the film, Patsy and Hugh are left cheering each other up, with Hugh still too weak to walk. The final scene is prefigured much earlier in the film, and the general sense is of submission to impersonal forces; Patsy and Hugh wouldn't have experienced themselves, nor reached this resolution, without the anarchic individualism (in the persons of Jill and Levet) which has led them and has then subsided. The spectacle of the tension was the film's subject; its resolution is the film's end. Patsy and Hugh are, perhaps, belittled by the film's anti-idealism which suggests a potentiality in Hitchcock either for affirmation or for mere negation. Patsy's strength is established early, but is lost sight of. Finally she and Hugh are chastened, but the characters have become indistinct, and the structure itself has long since taken over from

54 them. The ending is absolutely neutral in feeling.

The film draws a stronger emotional response in its earlier sections, leading to and including the revelation of Jill's cruelty, than in what follows. Hitchcock seems more fully engaged in those earlier sections, where the settings are specifically and solidly established, where the characters are substantial, and where the director is prodigal in ideas, particularly in relation to the atmosphere of heightened sexuality and of the separateness of the sexes. In the latter parts of the film, when (for its emotional crisis) it moves to the 'East', with its associations of evasion and male profligacy, a lack of specificity takes over, which is partly a loss of contact, mainly on the male character's part, with reality. The idea of dissolution is firmly present. This film's 'East' is the origin of the dream-like sections of *Vertigo* and of the red suffusions in *Marnie*. In both of those later films, Hitchcock found a method of communicating the suffusion of consciousness with another part of life; In *The Pleasure Garden*, they are formally distinct, but connected. When Levet is shot, he suddenly becomes sane; that and his death signal the relaxation of the hold which the East has had upon the characters.

Hitchcock, and not only in the early films, has a constant problem: he must suggest both the solidity and reality of what is given initially, as well as suggesting its fragility, for he always breaks down the characters' defences. He then must give the dissolution its own substantiality, and the failure of *The Pleasure Garden* is there. To achieve these constant ends, *The Lodger* takes a different route. Though immensely detached in tone, the film deals with a situation impregnated with barely-suppressed excitement; the main character is not *apparently* in a changed state until the very end of the film. The situation in which he finds himself, however, does alter, and is used to convey his own inner being. Like Conrad or William Wellman, Hitchcock accompanies his mastery of concreteness with a deliberate courting of insubstantiality. In *The Lodger* this is present in the atmosphere of suspicion, anxiety, fear and frenzy. The conditions for hysteria are present in all the characters (sometimes only by implication, as with the central character). *The Lodger* deliberately tries to seek out evil and disorder; amid the popular excitement and sensationalism he pursues his own (deceptively) precise aim of vengeance, but the surrounding excitement nevertheless mirrors his own excess. The agitation of the populace is an exact enactment of brittleness, and the breakdown occurs in the mob violence near the film's end. The violence, while it is directed at the Lodger, is also his own emotional crisis: he is absolutely central to every development in the film, and is almost always a 'presence' when not actually present. Hitchcock makes no attempt to give us the man's psychology, remaining resolutely outside him, conveying the Lodger's own sense of otherness, as well as the other characters' reactions to his self-absorption. The famous

use of plate glass to show us the man pacing to and fro above the family's living room is not only a technical *jeu d'esprit*, and neither is it an acknowledgment of some technical lack in the silent form, but is, rather, a simple portrayal of the family noting his 'otherness' and a summation of the director's capacity for detachment from him.

The other characters are rendered with attention to the kind of detail which asserts their ordinariness in comparison with the Lodger. Hitchcock is alive to routineness, naïvety, lack of experience, the ordinary surface of life, giving them their due even as, by implication, he subverts them. But the Lodger himself is close to these other people – in spite of his preparations, he never makes contact with his enemy. The Lodger is caught up in the hysteria, not only in the external sense, but also as a participant in it, in his inner life. His plans are like those of the police (a dissolve links their map with his) but it is finally the police who find and deal with the Avenger, off-screen. The news of the arrest ends the mob's hysteria and enacts the re-imposition of order, so that the Lodger can emerge, finally whole. He is seen, at last, in his own proper social setting. Having been thought to be the murderer, and having invited such suspicion as part of a sense of guilt and involvement (Hitchcock leaves the motivation obscure, but we have what we need), he has his morbidity lifted from him by a distant event. It is all a process to which he has fully submitted himself. When Joe, the detective who is disappointed in his love for Daisy, realises that the pursuit and persecution is wrongly directed, he tries to stop it, acknowledging himself and his own condition at the same time as he acts on behalf of his rival: Joe's self-knowledge prefigures and helps bring about the Lodger's own. In the earlier state of 'excitement', normal sexual interest is mistaken for perversion, and the sexual basis of the sensationalism is constantly stressed. Since the Lodger is out to 'avenge' his sister, the sexual connotations of his ambition are those of incest. But by enduring the process of his own disorder, he issues from it having formed a stable, properly external sexual relationship.

This long 'endurance' is a commitment to individualism, which ends in a balanced acknowledgment of social reality. What immediately precedes the conclusion is the 'crucifixion' of the Lodger, as he hangs by his handcuffs from the railings and the crowd set upon him, and his 'entombment' (the shot is based on classical compositions from paintings of the entombment of Christ) as the character is taken down exhausted and bleeding from the railings. The man's own sense of martyrdom is of a piece with his earlier, very deliberate distinctness; he suffers for his excessive individuality, and survives its death.

The almost constant presence of sensationalism as a subject is only barely contained by the eventual imposition of plot-level of order, and Hitchcock's method in the film invites the suspicion that

56 he is tempted, at the very least, to test his grasp of classical technique: the 'crucifixion' and 'entombment' shots mark a near-identification of the director's treatment and the character's self-pitying self-evaluation. One could say that the 'East' of *The Pleasure Garden* is all around the central character in *The Lodger*, and part of him, threatening to engulf him entirely. His stated motive (vengeance) is given no real substance in the film, and his descent into himself has the quality, rather, of gratuitousness, an act undertaken for the sake of a particular concept of individuality, but through an innocent compulsion rather than through any conscious intent.

Hitchcock's sense of editing, already in these early films, is both architectural and calculated to promote fluidity of development (nearer to German and American, than to Russian emphases). Hitchcock has found his method of containing as well as promoting individualism, and of finding their relative balance. The narcissism of the central character in *The Lodger* is that of Marnie in *Marnie*: each is driven to the ends of himself. In the earlier film the Lodger's condition is defined as feminine (the references to his sister and mother, his theatricality, the fact of his narcissism); in *Marnie* this part of life is disciplined by the male principle, which structures and controls its development into self-knowledge. Hitchcock's acknowledgment in *Lifeboat* of the Nazi's energy, and the anti-Communism of the late films, are both already implied in the individualism, and the deliberate seeking-out of evil, in *The Lodger*; the 'martyrdom' scene, in particular, prefigures the death of the Nazi in *Lifeboat* (where the emphasis falls, ambiguously indeed, on the victory of democracy). The latter film's entire conception belittles all its characters, and one could argue that *The Lodger*'s extreme interest in excitement and various forms of hysteria deprives it of real value, since that interest is not very satisfactorily balanced by the forces making for order (in the structure, as well as on the level of plot, and in other senses).

The film, however, is rightly taken to be decisively 'Hitchcockian', with its suspense, its manipulation of audience-reactions, its strong audience-identification figure, its sense of absolute control on the part of the director, for most of its length. Because of the level of that control, one has the sense, already referred to, that the central character is, in spite of his activity, the essentially passive subject of a process which is both within himself and entailed by life. *The Lodger* is, because of this, not 'dramatic' in the sense of presenting any real conflict among its characters. I think this could be said of most of Hitchcock's English films. His central figures are victims of themselves rather than of any other person or external force. The films do embody a dialectic between the claims of the instincts and those of social proprieties, but 'conflict' never seems an appropriate description: there is always, rather, the submission to a process, fundamentally an inner one.

Very clear examples of the passivity this implies are *The Farmer's Wife* and *Champagne*, because of their absolute simplicity and their relaxation. In the latter, a girl is deceived by her wealthy father into thinking that he has lost all his money and that she must fend for herself. Her father subjects her (and the film implicitly endorses his act) to this experience, which occupies most of the film, to punish her for her choice of fiancé; the comedy is brought to a close by his acceptance of his daughter's choice and the ending of the deception with each of the main characters more securely himself. A more substantial subjection of a character, this time more clearly to his *own* inner processes, is to be found in *The Farmer's Wife*. The farmer's wife dies, and he must choose another. Slowness becomes the film's very subject: on the one hand there is the age, stability and habit suggested by the treatment of the farmer's household, where nothing happens with any speed, and on the other, the farmer himself, listing the possible choices of a wife, testing each of them while his maid, Minta, who has always been present, is eventually seen to be the one. The farmer's attempts to find a wife from beyond the household are a calm equivalent of the straining ambition in the central character of *The Lodger*; the choice of Minta is a return to the centre of the farmer's being, and a self-limitation. Diversity is assumed by him to be what is required; his temptation by it and his testing of it concern much of the film's length, but the rich continuities of the household and the farm are quietly present at every point and seen to be continuous with the countryside itself. The film's humour is perfectly contained within the formal integrity. In spite of the number of titles (it is adapted from a successful stage play), the film's weight falls without the least doubt on its *mise-en-scène*. Its intensity of feeling is invested in the quiet behaviour, appearance and compartment of the household's characters (Gordon Harker's performance as Ash is crucial), its objects and in its very fabric, rather than in anything brought to the film from outside, either by any character or by the director himself. Hitchcock is more completely detached and impersonal in this film than in any other that I know of. The discipline of the *direct* adaptation and quality of the film's feeling are inextricable in accounting for the work's formal and emotional success. Its untypicality in the Hitchcock *oeuvre* doesn't represent a defeat: it seems to me a higher achievement than *The Lodger*. (Any theory of creativity which doesn't allow for this kind of acknowledgment is certainly inadequate.) *The Farmer's Wife* convincingly eschews the 'permanently treacherous and ominous' universe one finds elsewhere in Hitchcock; the film's substance is its unforced respect for its main characters' separateness from and dependence upon each other. Minta is almost the very principle of quiet stability, and is central to the film's structure.

In spite of its 'Englishness', the film is specifically European rather than specifically English, and what marks it off from Ameri-



58 can films is the degree of its cool unassertiveness. The idea of characters being directed by life occurs in all narrative art, but in *The Farmer's Wife* there is a sense of absolute submission to provided rhythms, a simple, perfect logic quietly enacted – though the characters lose nothing of themselves in the submission: in fact, it is the submission itself which allows them their freedom (and this film is a clear example in this respect of what is always at least implicit in Hitchcock). The fact that one cannot look to Hitchcock for genuine 'Englishness' is consequent upon his individualism, his sense of an undifferentiated universe, to which one nevertheless submits and which can be assimilated into a sense of order and logic – though the assimilation implies no comfort. The closeness of Hitchcock and Conrad can be recalled: Conrad, beyond his adoption of and mastery of English, was a Pole and a sailor. The dangers, in artistic terms, which might be expected to arise from such a sense of the universe, are those of diffuseness and of a lack of faith in wholeness, strength and passion. Its potential strength are in its simple universality: the commercial cinema is exactly Hitchcock's place. The best response to those dangers is in concreteness and energy within the comprehensive framework and control provided by classic narrative techniques.

*The Farmer's Wife* could only be brought off once: Hitchcock developed the potentially more demanding and rewarding line of *The Lodger*, in which there is, above all, great pressure exerted on the logical framework of meaning by its central character's commitment to individualism.

The period from *Blackmail* to *Rich and Strange* precedes the best of Hitchcock's English films (which are among his thirties features), but represents a transition from the silent films, retaining a greater closeness to the films of the twenties than to their more substantial successors. One of these transitional films is *Murder*, belonging to a genre (the 'whodunit') in which the director was never to work again; the period also includes further literary adaptations (*Juno and the Paycock* from Sean O'Casey, and *The Skin Game* from Galsworthy) of a respectable kind which Hitchcock soon abandoned. Hitchcock can be seen to be gradually refining his own sense of the rules which were to govern his work, a sense, one might say, of propriety, of what works best with audiences and is artistically right. The kind of films which he decided to abandon amount, on this view to indiscretions. The greatest directors in the commercial cinema became themselves by knowing their audiences. Before arriving at his own conventions, Hitchcock constantly experimented with kinds of artifice, and turned frequently to the theatre for sustenance – not-only in the evident sense that he adapted stage plays for films, but in using theatrical artifice as a theme or a characteristic of his own work.

Thus, the theatricality of the *Lodger* himself may be recalled; as

can the first half of *The Pleasure Garden*; and the idea of performance is strongly present in *Champagne*. Even more than the latter *Murder* is about performance, and directly so, in being concerned with the traditional theatre and drawing on its techniques (eg voices in unison, interior monologue). Characteristically, its theme is that of a disciplined individualist pursuing an extreme version of himself, or perhaps a component of himself, which is a riotous and narcissistic individualism (in this case that of a homosexual transvestite) which has no allegiance to anyone or anything beyond itself. The solving of the murder has the force of a self-discipline for the investigator, who, like the Lodger and his successors in Hitchcock, is an amateur. To overcome himself he must explore himself and go to his limits, breaking the rules in order to arrive at a genuine order which has a general social validity rather than a merely personal one: his act is the image of the film's moral nature, and the director virtually identifies himself with the character who is the film's single central consciousness and the source of the film's structure. It is a remarkably austere and disciplined film, and in that respect especially it gives us some of the tone of the later thirties features; also it is conceived as a film with sound rather than being in any sense a converted silent.

The others of the 'transitional' films which I want to deal with more nearly resemble the silents in tone and structure: *Blackmail* was conceived as a silent, while *Juno and the Paycock*, *The Skin Game* and *Rich and Strange* could all have been so conceived without much altering their form (*Juno* would have disposed of much of its dialogue, and that would have been an advantage). One of *Blackmail*'s two principal characters is a professional and a policeman: on both counts he is unusual among Hitchcock's major characters; the director seems to have used the occasion to exhaust his own interest in such a figure (although the detectives in *Sabotage* and *Frenzy* (1972) bear some relation to him) and the themes he introduces. Frank Webber is the stolid, stable detective who carries out his work impersonally and efficiently, and washes his hands of it at the end of each day. Alice is 'contrary', restless in the ordinariness which she is tempted to abandon. Her dissatisfaction leads her (she leads herself) to murder. The temptation, and then the headiness of her abandonment of the conventional, the known and the reliable is conveyed by the crane-shot which follows her to the artist's room, by the heavy, sensual lighting of the scene's conclusion as, all 'innocent' she takes off her dress and then struggles against an attempted rape and stabs the man; and finally there is the high-shot down the centre of the staircase, as in *Vertigo* (1958). There follows the justly famous silent sequence in which Alice, in a state of shock and obsessed by what she has done, walks desolate through the streets. The sequence successfully and relevantly contrasts with everything before and after it, being shot in the streets, in natural light, and it is, in particular, in such high-angled long-shots that

60 it contrasts forcefully with the mid-shots and close-up of Alice which we tend to have elsewhere in the film: we have to adjust our view of her because of that, and our sympathy has to then be based on detachment; it is technically the film's most perfectly classical sequence. When Alice feels most adrift after 'breaking the rules', Hitchcock gives us a *tour-de-force* of unobstrusive technical precision and control. (It seems worth stressing that the sequence is silent. The use of sound-dialogue in the film is usually either stilted or irritating, and though Hitchcock uses it quite as well in conveying Alice's earlier superficiality as in the more famous instance of her selection of the word 'knife' from the breakfast-table conversation, it is not essentially a sound film.) Alice's growing sense of guilt is paralleled by Frank's compounding of it in suppressing the evidence of her guilt. The blackmailer is parasitical: his brief domination of the situation is clearly felt to be unstable, an embodiment of the couple's pretence, but he is also the humane sense of guilt, in a grotesque form. His presence in the shop and in Alice's home, both of which represent a social stability, is a symbolic as well as a direct reminder of the disruption of normality. Frank's willingness to put aside his professionalism for Alice makes the disruption complete. When the blackmailer is pursued and dies in a fall from the roof of the British Museum (age and stability in concrete form), Frank stops Alice as she is about to give herself up to the police: she complies with his eagerness to evade the law and the truth (and that is the force of it; the similar ending of *Sabotage* has a rather different tone). Alice is finally reconciled to carrying with her the sense of, not just a particular indiscretion, no matter what its magnitude, but rather of her own capacity for disorder. Carrying that sense with her, she contains it; Frank's assistance is her own capability for reconstituting that necessary and sustaining normality which she earlier felt impelled to shatter. The film justifies her, at every stage, but the ending is deliberately low-key, as the endings of Hitchcock's films tend to be: there is rarely anything to celebrate.

The weaker films (*Juno*, *The Skin Game*, *Rich and Strange*) among this group go further in portraying their character's relationship with life as attritional and destructive. *Juno* is concerned with a family, with the mother, Juno herself, at its centre as it disintegrates. John Ford might well have taken the same subject (and did adapt O'Casey in *The Plough and the Stars*) but would certainly have given us a positive force in the enacted emotional values and in the strength of the mother: Hitchcock deprives the potentially positive forces of their weight so that the film is dominated by its mere sadness. The humour is usually so evidently cruel and selfish that it offers no counterweight. The early sound stage is a good equivalent to a theatrical stage, and the film is thoroughly enclosed; most of its characters are inward-turning, puritanical and morbid, and their actions contribute to the centrifugal forces which finally

leave only Juno herself on the 'stage'. The outer political and social situation simply helps to enact the innate tendencies of the characters; it has no independent existence beyond the way it is perceived by the characters and in the way they react to it. Insofar as there is a story-line beyond that of the mother losing her sons it is the comic interlude in which the family suppose they have come into money, but after which they have finally to return to themselves.

This interlude and its conclusion leads into *Rich and Strange* in which a very ordinary suburban couple 'escape' from routine after acquiring money (an exact inversion of *Champagne*) but are at last glad to return home with nausea among their last responses to their 'freedom'. Raymond Durgnat sums up the film thus: 'They have settled again into their rut, a little more disillusioned with each other, but just as bored, and certainly no wiser about life, love, death, existence.'<sup>4</sup> A comparison with (for instance) *The Pleasure Garden*, *The Lodger* and *Blackmail* suggests that Hitchcock intended the experience to have been one of the revelation of disorder; although the film's meaning is plain without any comparison of that kind, we can see that Hitchcock places the couple in *Rich and Strange* among those characters who are dissatisfied with the stability of convention, are tempted out of it, and then return to the same state they left, understanding that it *contains* and controls what they have just experienced, the rest of life. 'The rest of life' provides the substance of the film, however, and Hitchcock wants the audience to be subjectively involved but under his control: the parallel with *Blackmail* is very close, and this is its comic counterpart. Durgnat is right to point to the lack of any strong positive: the film is typical, in that, of these intermediate films. *The Skin Game*, however, is a partial exception.

The intermediate films tend to be accumulations of incident and 'ideas' rather than being complexly structured – closer to *The Lodger* than to *The Pleasure Garden*. But *The Skin Game*, because of its source material and also for more intriguing reasons, is very decisively structured as a conflict of characters and of the values they represent. Those films which seem to be loosely structured 'accumulations' leave us with their characters still seeming unformed, as though there were no possibilities of their genuinely structuring their experience or of their experience being, in itself, structured. *The Skin Game* looks forward to the later thirties films (which take almost picaresque elements and subject them to an absolute order) but does so by extracting the principle of order, almost as the looser films like *Rich and Strange* extract the principle of accumulation. Together, the two types form the unity found in each of the better thirties features.

*The Skin Game* contrasts the old order of the decent conservative, Hillcrest, with the irruption of the 'new' man, Hornblow, a self-made industrialist who ushers in modernity with its cruelty and dynamism. Hillcrest's insubstantial kind of purity is lost, and the

62 old order dies by virtue of the very fact of there being a conflict. The new force comes from beneath, and Hillcrest has to stoop to meanness in order to fight it, admitting his own capacity for cruel individualism, symbolised in his wife's investigations. Both sides are chastened, each having been cruel to the other, and each having acknowledged the other, while the young couple suggest a possible future unity. The shapelessness of *Juno* gives way to the comparatively tight form of *The Skin Game*. Both are faithful literary adaptations, but are also expressions of a stage in Hitchcock's own testing of priorities. This film's sense of form is enacted in the thematic material. There is sufficient social conservatism and desire for respectability in Hornblow, and sufficient puritanism, for him to back down in the face of the threat to reveal his daughter's sexual indiscretion. She kills herself. Hitchcock contains the whole development (the attritional relationship of the two families) with equanimity and detachment and suggests an order derived from the conflict. As at the end of *The Skin Game*, Hitchcock's characters lose any diffuseness in their sense of themselves and are made to acknowledge the simple concreteness of life, flesh and death – to acknowledge, in fact, their own limits, though the drama lay in their instinctive rebellions.

Lindsay Anderson's case for Hitchcock<sup>5</sup> was that his qualities were those of an entrepreneur and a technician: speed, surprise, boldness, excitement, flair, enterprise, skill – but not drama: 'Hitchcock has never been a serious director'. Anderson was, despite himself, recognising Hitchcock's impersonality, and was baffled by it. It is common for Left-wing writers to assume that conservatism has no intellectual status, and that, too, may be why Anderson really couldn't see anything but cleverness in Hitchcock. It is relevant to note that Anderson rated William Wellman's failure *The Ox-Bow Incident* far above the same director's *Westward the Women*: the first was wrongly interpreted as a Left-wing 'protest', while the latter (it seems to me) is an unpretentious but great film.

The qualities Anderson noted in Hitchcock are abundantly present in the English features from *The Man Who Knew Too Much* onwards, when the director had found his tone and style, and a characteristic balance of constraint and freedom. The contrast of *Rich and Strange* (1930) with *The Man Who Knew Too Much* (1934) represents an amazing leap in technical accomplishment, part of a greater artistic discipline and precision, and of an increased ability to fully accommodate his characteristic themes within impersonal structures. It also marks the new discipline in general of the sound film's form: structurally there has been a revaluation of priorities, a quite new tempo is established, and a new intricacy made possible. Intricacy isn't necessarily complexity, but it takes its place in Hitchcock's newly characteristic method partly as an expression of increased control – an image, in fact, of itself. Lindsay Anderson

seems to have recoiled from the degree of Hitchcock's control: he can't stand such detachment. Irving Howes' failure, which I mentioned near the beginning of the article, to grasp the sense of Conrad's impersonality is perhaps comparable. But the more secure an artist's control of his material, short of injuring it, the greater his ability to do exactly what he feels it necessary to do.<sup>7</sup> An inarticulate artist may have much to communicate, but how can we tell what it is, much less evaluate it?

Hitchcock needed sound: his silents were his apprenticeship. *The Man Who Knew Too Much* is the beginning of a major period (just as its re-make heralded the beginning of his major American period). The film's tautness is new: he has the framework, now, to deal successfully with the themes already signalled – subversion as disorder, the place and placing of individuality and of individualism, with their capacity for disorder. 'Breaking the rules' becomes a major concern: it is a central thread in this film, in *The Thirty-Nine Steps* and in *Young and Innocent*. The achievement of meaning by those characters who break the rules is an image for the film's own formal achievement. The elliptical movement of the films has qualities analogous to the energy, impatience, mobility and directness of their central male characters, but also has qualities like those of the female characters who carry out or represent the restoration of order in *The Man Who Knew Too Much* and *Young and Innocent*.

In the former, structure has been elevated to a position at least equal to that of *mise-en-scène*, into which dialogue is now perfectly integrated. Indeed, the intonation and phrasing of the characters' speeches are an excellent guide to the film's own tone: the talkie had already found one of its masters. The intellectual conception of the film at stages before shooting commenced is just visible – most noticeably, near the film's opening in the accident on the ski-run: the incident is conceived for the storyboard rather than for the film, and there is a general sense in the film that our attention is being organised for us. The best of the American films lead us without our necessarily being aware of it. But this doesn't simply mean that the English film is inferior. V. F. Perkins<sup>8</sup> compares the original and the remake of *The Man Who Knew Too Much*, using a specific detail; he concludes: 'The 1934 version has to be interpreted before it can create its emotional effect. The more subtle procedure made possible by colour allows Hitchcock to bypass the intellectual response and go straight to the emotions.' I don't see that this demonstrates inferiority in the earlier film: it is an economical and effective procedure, relevant to the thematic content of the sequence (the Albert Hall sequence) which is, to put it simply, the effort to think and the pressure of feeling, when each of these is pulling in two directions. (The use of colour in the 1956 version of the scene seems to me to be an unsuccessful element in an otherwise unflawed scene.)

In both versions the scene is one of the interconnected climaxes; in terms of suspense, *the* climax. In the English version Jill Lawrence finds herself present at the impending assassination of a foreign statesman; almost hysterical in her helplessness to prevent it, and knowing of the likely fate of her child is she gives warning, she screams at the moment the gunman shoots, spoiling his aim. The film has taken her from her earlier brittle narcissism into situations which have, progressively, made her morally and emotionally naked, at the centre of great stress and have tested her capacity for responsiveness to others. Her last acts in the film exactly reverse her earliest acts, in relation to her child; whom she now saves and embraces. In the Albert Hall sequence, which just preceded this, she was reduced to herself, her thoughts and feelings: her instinctive response broke through by itself, and this makes possible her final decisiveness.

The order she establishes is not the order represented by the government agents who advise her to act against her child's interest, neither is it of the kind represented by the choir and orchestra or by the police. Being a conservative individualist, Hitchcock portrays uniformity as either sinister, passive or brittle. In *The Pleasure Garden* when Levett is shot, he snaps out of his delusions and aimably greets the doctor who has shot him. His 'Hello, doctor' is paralleled in *The Man Who Knew Too Much*: Louis Bernard is shot on a dance-floor, and is so embarrassed at dying in a public place that he apologises politely. Hitchcock and the actor (Pierre Fresnay) bring it off so that the man doesn't seem ridiculous in spite of the incongruity. Bernard is trying, even as he dies, to see that order is restored, but the disorder claims him and he does die. Later in the film, Abbott (leader of the revolutionaries) says sinisterly, but as though it came naturally to him, that 'It's impolite to be late for a concert'. The method of the planned assassination uses the civilised form against itself (the moment of the shooting can be exactly planned because of it). The precise concern of one individual for another is also used against itself (the child as hostage) but this puts in train the mother's development – from narcissism to her exact individualism and the active impatience of the father's love for his child.

The father, Bob Lawrence, encounters various forms of suppression (the padded door at the dentist's is echoed in the design of the door in the house where the final events take place). But, closer at first to his daughter than is her mother, he carries out the investigation (into lower-class areas, symbolic here as elsewhere in Hitchcock of disturbance and danger) and yields finally to his wife's action in concluding the danger to their daughter: it is Jill Lawrence's victory, which he, however, made possible. Her husband's fight eventually disintegrates: the gradual collapse of the revolutionaries under siege is the sapping of his energy, while Jill's new energy and control results from the extremity of her own

development. While her husband's inner conflict is represented in his being face to face with Abbott's corrupt narcissism (the extreme version of the father's own insistence on his individuality) her related conflict is portrayed as the loss of an inadequate self-control (she swoons; she is seen in tight, insistent profile close-up; her vision blurs). The emotional stress is hers, and Hitchcock emphasises the interiorness of her struggle, as opposed to her husband's, which is enacted in character-confrontations. While the director gives convention its due (for instance, in the death of Louis Bernard) he portrays individualism and its personal emphases as the centre of a true order.

There follows a group of films – *The Thirty-Nine Steps*, *The Secret Agent* and *Sabotage* – in which there is always a political level thematically, and in which there continues to be the concluding victory of order and of the nation beyond the victory of individuals, as in *The Man Who Knew Too Much*. But individuals are now much more completely the subjects of the films. Hitchcock deliberately makes the political level in *The Thirty-Nine Steps* almost invisible, so that Hannay is evidently being himself rather than primarily pursuing a purpose beyond himself. In *The Secret Agent* the framework of espionage and counter-espionage is subservant to character-relationships: Ashenden is only led to know himself because of his compulsive professionalism, but it is noticeable that a sense of responsibility doesn't emerge as his motivation, unless it is an instinctive responsibility to himself. The same is true of *Sabotage*: the extinction of the anarchist Verloc is at his wife's hands, and because he has killed her little brother. In each of these films, the nation's good follows on individuals pursuing their own completion.

*The Thirty-Nine Steps* picks Richard Hannay out of a crowd, but only because he is himself picked out by events. Hitchcock doesn't trouble to prepare us; Hannay remains unpredictable, in accordance with the world in which he finds himself. In treating what is, in effect when not in evident fact, the pursuit of an isolated consciousness in whom is located a vital sense of urgency but who meets suspicion, treachery, fear and otherness, the film resembles *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*. In being so smooth, so fluid in style and so linear in structure, the resemblance is taken further, though Hitchcock's film has more distancing humour, and Hannay seems able to draw upon an almost unbroken outward relaxation and outward indifference even in extreme crisis. Hitchcock wants to depict that kind of character, but there is another reason for Hannay's outward indifference: his inner turmoil is being acted out beyond himself. The whole film is an extension of his being: the 'character' we watch is merely the core of his own being (in this respect only, Raoul Walsh's *Pursued* offers a parallel), hence his apparent lack of characteristics, beyond his resource and humour – though Robert Donat's performance and 'presence' are



He is constantly taking on, assuming, using aspects of the people and places in which he finds himself: the milkman's clothes, the train, the girder on the bridge, the crofter's jacket and prayer-book, the sheep, the waterfall, the procession, and so on – all are used as part of himself, rather than merely to hide or disguise himself with: they are those parts of his being which he can draw upon in his need, the concretisation of his adequacy, in the face of his own impulse to evil. It is Expressionism, but subjected to the absolute demands of concreteness and dramatic energy, and no character is denatured for the sake of any abstract scheme. The final stage of Hannay's struggle with himself are marked by Pamela's belief in him (the handcuffs only seemed a constraint; having slipped from them she decides to stay with him), by their bringing in the uncomprehending police, and by Hannay's incisive, direct question to Mr. Memory, who is subject to his own compulsive professionalism (his sense of form and performance) and who dies when he has completed Hannay's drive towards the truth. He completes Hannay's own sense of himself. The film's detachment and unruffled form shouldn't be mistaken (as they were by Lindsay Anderson) for indifference of any kind. A little like Hannay, Hitchcock subjects the entire development to himself in an exactly sufficient structure. Jacques Tourneur's adaptation of the film's final scene for his own *Berlin Express* is a confirmation of Hitchcock's affinity with the purity of the classic American cinema.

*The Secret Agent* begins with its hero's funeral (a fake, but the emphasis is clear) and his being given a new name. This marks off everything that might have gone before: the film sets out to present his completeness. The funeral also dominates not only his specific condition at the beginning of the film (a lack of fulfilment, a stagnation) but also his permanent condition, as he presides over or merely comes across, deaths. Unlike Hannay, Ashenden in this film is without any genuinely controlling humorous detachment and finds his drive towards knowledge of himself to be mainly just grinding and painful. Hannay's pretences and disguises seemed to emanate from no pressure, but rather from an endless resilience and capacity for action: Ashenden's ploys and deceptions are shot with a sense of guilt. His eventual victory has little elation in it: 'Never again!' Thematic content of this kind needn't necessarily lead to inferior films, but it is hard not to note that *The Man Who Knew Too Much* and *The Thirty-Nine Steps*, both of which issue in unambiguous victories, have a much greater sense of inclusiveness and a greater dramatic richness than does *The Secret Agent*. The characteristic themes, of rooting out pretence in oneself by thoroughly acting it out, and of compulsive professionalism (Ashenden can't help pursuing the case even when he has decided not to – the compulsion being his instinctive drive to the completion of himself) are there, however. Also, the simplicity of the structure

and of the images themselves doesn't only indicate a lack; it is also a close relative to the stylistic boldness and lucidity of *Young and Innocent*.

*Sabotage* intervenes, in which, as in *The Secret Agent*, there is no relief when disorder is contained. Hitchcock chose to re-enact the ending of *Blackmail*: the murderess goes to give herself up to the police, but is persuaded by a policeman not to go through with it. As is often the case in Hitchcock, the sense of impurity dominates all other aspects of the film: we feel Mrs Verloc to be neither innocent nor guilty, but that she is beyond ethical judgment. Above everything else she carries away with her at the film's ending a knowledge of herself – not just of the murder, but of her naïve acceptance of Verloc's disdainful pretence that he was 'like a father' to the boy, of little Stevie's horrible death and, in general, of her own self-inflicted martyrdom. In this case the compulsion is the woman's while her male companion, a policeman, is a professional who, on a thematic level, cannot carry through the final action because it is *her* condition that is in question. She executes Verloc, and ends the various pretences which held the situation together, and which all carried overtones of possible treachery – including the policeman's ingratiating himself with Mrs Verloc and Stevie, and her own self-deception. The pretences are 'normal'; the murder of Verloc shatters the condition. What prevents this view of life being over-heated or hysterical is the director's evenness of tone, the sombreness of the style, the detachment of the presentation. When Mrs Verloc turns away from the police at the end she has been persuaded not to acquiesce in an order for its own sake: the law would have made a decision, a summing-up, an abstraction of her, which would have been tidy but evasive. The order to which Hitchcock is devoted is the logic of individualism.

Evading the law has a similar connotation in *Young and Innocent*. Robert is being taken to trial for a murder he did not commit: he escapes instead of acquiescing in the 'due process'. He finally clears himself and delivers the murder up to the system he had himself evaded. His ally throughout is Erica, daughter of the Lord Lieutenant of the county. There would be no difficulty in demonstrating the film's social conservatism (it invites us to do so): the lower classes and the socially deprived are used to represent violence, disorder and the general disturbance in the nature of things, while at the end of the film Robert is declared fit to be invited to dinner by Erica's father. Robert has delivered up the right man to the law, and in doing so has removed a factor of instability from the presented social situation (the earlier satire in the system, and the very fact of Robert's wrongful arrest are simply *there*). For the duration of Robert's 'pursued' period, he uses the social situation, at each of its levels, never genuinely participating in any of them. When finally, he can 'come to dinner' the dramatic development is concluded.

The development is partly where we would expect it: in his relationship with the murderer, who is another example of the undisciplined individualism which the Hitchcock hero pursues in order to eradicate his own worst impulses: one individualist in pursuit of another. The murderer and the murder are immediately associated with night, a stormy sea and height which are the symbolic, extreme extension of Robert's own instinctive and emotional life; when finally located, the murderer is in blackface, twitching. Robert is played off against the murderer, but also against the police whom he outwits. Erica, a character whose presence and solidity are major achievements of the *mise-en-scène*, is Robert's earnest of eventual social acceptance. She represents, without pretension on anyone's part, the unformed potential of the social order, and her awareness is modified by her embroilment with Robert. Her stability is essential to the film, and together with Robert she embodies the qualities of freshness, youth and resilience which Hitchcock had referred to in his early films (*The Pleasure Garden*, *The Lodger*.)

The film's simple, bold compositions derive from *The Secret Agent* rather than from the sombreness of *Sabotage*; the sparseness and lucidity of the structure and of the *mise-en-scène* are also closely related to those qualities in *The Secret Agent*. What makes the contrast is that *Young and Innocent* is a comedy (often brightly lit), solid because of Hitchcock's confidence in the solidity of the leading characters, on whom he relies to a very high degree, providing little which is of interest beyond them. But there is no suggestion of any pressure in Hitchcock's concentration on them or in the actor's performances. The simplicity of the spectacle becomes a major quality. The murderer is made to seem quite alien, so that the suspense which proceeds from the resemblance between his extremity and the hero's condition is lost sight of for most of the film: we are concerned more with the possibility of the hero being recaptured by the police. The murderer's violence and emotionalism are strongly presented at the film's opening, and then not referred to again; when finally caught, he seems pathetic. The murderer's decline and Robert's determination and resilience are closely related: the hero's self-discipline and his need to convince others are again main threads. But the playing down of the murderer's importance throws the weight almost entirely on the relationship of hero and heroine and on their discipline rather than on any implied capacity in them for evil and profound disorder. The solidity and substantially (a question of *mise-en-scène*) of the main characters seem to me to be major qualities, though the tone is certainly light. The shifting of emphasis away from the characteristic themes (the main themes of this article) and away from the suspense, onto the weight and presence of the characters makes the film an anticipation of the major American films, especially *Notorious* (1946) and *Marnie* (1964) (both of which are enormously superior to *Young and Innocent*). The virtual absence or modification (after the opening

sequences) of the usual undercurrents of sensationalism and of the usual sinister atmosphere of suspicion make *Young and Innocent* unusual in the major English sound period. The conservatism one finds everywhere in Hitchcock is rarely found with such a clear social dimension; this film is the simplest demonstration that his individualism is conservative. In the films which are more decisively concerned with evil and disorder, these qualities are always integrated into the respective final unities which the films represent: their characters have to live with the knowledge they have acquired, of what they themselves are. That is the characteristic balance, which *Young and Innocent* complements.

### Notes

1. *Screen*, vol 10, No 4/5.
2. Howe, Irving: *Politics and the Novel*, Horizon Press, New York, 1957 and (paperback) Meridian, New York, 1957.
3. *Ibid.* p 82.
4. Durgnat, Raymond: *A Mirror for England*, Faber, 1971, p 204
5. In *Sequence*, No 9, Autumn 1949.
6. V. F. Perkins: *Film as Film: Understanding and Judging Movies*, Pelican Original, 1972, p 56.

## HITCHCOCK'S ENGLISH FILMS PRE 1940

### Silent Films

- 1921 Always Tell Your Wife, Famous-Players-Lasky, Islington
- 1922 Number Thirteen, Famous-Players-Lasky (never completed)
- 1925 The Pleasure Garden, Gainsborough-Emelka
- 1926 The Mountain Eagle, Gainsborough-Emelka
- 1926 The Lodger, Gainsborough-Emelka
- 1927 Downhill, Gainsborough
- 1927 Easy Virtue, Gainsborough
- 1927 The Ring, British International Pictures
- 1928 The Farmer's Wife, British International Pictures
- 1928 Champagne, British International Pictures
- 1929 The Manxman, British International Pictures

### Sound Films

- 1929 Blackmail, British International Pictures
- 1930 Elstree Calling, directed by Adrian Brunel: Hitchcock directed two of the sketches. British International Pictures
- 1930 Juno & the Paycock, British International Pictures
- 1930 Murder, British International Pictures
- 1931 The Skin Game, British International Pictures
- 1932 Rich and Strange, British International Pictures
- 1932 Number Seventeen, British International Pictures
- 1932 Lord Camber's Ladies, produced by Hitchcock, directed by Benn W Levy. British International Pictures
- 1933 Waltzes from Vienna, Gaumont/British
- 1934 The Man Who Knew Too Much, Gaumont/British
- 1935 The Thirty-nine Steps, Gaumont/British

- 70    1936    The Secret Agent, Gaumont/British  
      1936    Sabotage, Gaumont/British  
      1937    Young and Innocent, Gainsborough  
      1938    The Lady Vanishes, Gainsborough  
      1939    Jamaica Inn, Mayflower Studios

This interview with Ivor Montagu continues the investigation of the British cinema that began in the last issue of *Screen* with the Cavalcanti and Gavin Lambert interviews. Montagu's cinema career was unique. He was one of a rare species in that he was a cinema intellectual and a producer working in the orthodox commercial feature industry. He was involved in almost all of the crucial stages in the development of the British cinema. He helped to create a minority film culture in this country through his work as a founder of the London Film Society. He worked with one of the most influential producers, Sir Michael Balcon, and one of the most important directors, Alfred Hitchcock – he helped Hitchcock at two of the most important phases of his early career when Hitchcock was first establishing himself as a director in the late 1920's and when he finally discovered himself as an artist with the series of thrillers beginning with *The Man Who Knew Too Much* (1934). He was one of the founders of the film technicians union, the ACT (now the ACTT, Association of Cinematographic and Television Technicians) which has had an important influence on the character of the British film industry. Added to all this activity he worked with Eisenstein in Hollywood and also directed a number of short films ranging from comic fiction like *Bluebottles* to political propaganda like *Peace and Plenty*.

The issues we wanted to pursue with Montagu were very much dictated by his various involvements. We were interested in the social and intellectual character of the London Film Society; the nature of his collaboration with Hitchcock and Balcon; and about the conditions and the ideas that led to the formation of the ACT. We also wanted to find out something about Montagu's own ideas and the choices he had made in his career. He was one of the few British film intellectuals who had worked in commercial feature film making as opposed to the documentary industry. How far was this a conscious choice based on a criticism of the 1930's documentary movement? As a political activist and a film-maker what kind of relationship did he see between politics and film-making? Did he have a concept of political cinema in the 1930's?

We hope the attempt to do this provides useful insights and information about the British cinema in the formative years of the 1920's and 1930's.

ALAN LOVELL

Ivor Montagu was interviewed by Peter Wollen, Alan Lovell and Sam Rohdie, in London on 24 May 1972.

*How did you first get involved in the cinema?*

When I was a child we used to go and see things like 'Pimple' and The Drews, and that was very early.<sup>1</sup> Then at Cambridge I began to be interested in the highbrow things that came along like *Caligari* – we gave a special show up there, got it down in spite of censorship and so on. After that we started film criticism at Cambridge in several papers – one or two we began ourselves. We managed to get some into the *Granta*, which was the sort of establishment paper. After Cambridge, looking for a job, imagining one was a journalist because one does undergraduate journalism, I got an assignment from *The Times* to go to Germany to report on the German film industry. I went over for a short time and made the acquaintance of a number of people, saw Jannings and Elizabeth Bergner.<sup>2</sup> The trouble was that, having had a scientific training, I found it much more difficult to write about something when I knew a little about it than when I knew nothing. I would have been delighted to write about it before I went, but when I came back I told *The Times* that I didn't know enough and turned it in. On my way back I met Hugh Miller, the actor, who is still alive, and we got talking in the corridor of the train – he was on his way back from making a picture in Munich – and we had the idea of starting a film society, and we sort of both talked about it as a society like the Stage Society.<sup>3</sup>

The Stage Society introduced Ibsen, gave performances of Shaw, when he couldn't get on the commercial stage, and Strindberg, who was never done, and others, either for censorship reasons or because they weren't thought to be popular. We thought there are such a lot of films that we are interested in that are being made abroad, that we would like to fertilise British film ideas by seeing some of them. If we could get a film society together like the Stage Society (which gets enough people to pay for sets and organisation) we could pay for an orchestra, and put film titles into English, and the audience – a small audience – would be able to see films under the best possible circumstances. In this way we could draw into film, artists, sculptors, writers, who up to then disdained films. Films were in general disdained. It was supposed to be low taste. Intellectual snobs would have nothing to do with film but of course when it was organised on the lines of the Film Society, they poured in. Also, we could get the newspapers to take an interest. Apart from Iris Barry, who was given a chance to do some film criticism in the *Spectator* by the Stracheys, there was no film criticism in any of the serious papers – *The Sunday Times*, the *Observer*, *The Times*, the weeklies. We thought that by organising special shows we would be able to interest such people. In that respect it was entirely

successful. We had, of course, very considerable difficulties to contend with. The trade was bitterly opposed to the Society. We in our innocence had thought that we would only deal with films that were otherwise unmarketable. We would demonstrate that there was an audience for this or that film so the trade should have been pleased. Also, we would be drawing new people into the cinema and perhaps, as well, new people to work in the cinema, new talent, and that should have pleased the trade. But no. The fact that something could be found entertaining which had no place on the popular screen implied, they felt, criticism of the trade. And so the two trade papers – there were two in those days – both criticised us severely.

*On what grounds?*

Interfering. That the cinema was a business, a commercial operation, and that we were going to arouse a lot of people who would be critical of the popular cinema and praise things that could never be shown to the public . . . that was the line.

We also found difficulty from quite unexpected quarters, among newspaper critics. For example, C A Lejeune, who was such a good influence in those early days in getting people interested in films, in not being just a paid hack, was opposed to the Film Society from the start. She said we were operating on the wrong basis by not showing pictures directly to the public. Of course that was absolutely true, but it was a question of doing what you could and trying to create a demand. It did result in a number of public cinemas up and down the country opening some years later.

*You said one of the ideas behind the Society was to influence British ideas about the cinema.*

Yes.

*Was it successful from that point of view?*

Well, yes it was, but that took some time before results appeared on the screen. We attracted young talent, people like Asquith, and they would bring their families, and their families would let them if they needed 'letting' and gave them encouragement, because this had become a popular thing. What made it possible was Bernstein's backing because he had influence with the trade and he helped us a great deal.<sup>4</sup> Although the trade also somehow despised him because they said he was trying to live in two worlds, the intellectual and the commercial, and they were very jealous of someone who was an egghead and a successful financier. Also important was the fact that my father knew Lord Ashfield, who was connected with the New Gallery, and this helped to get the New Gallery free



74 for the Society – things like that. The local council was opposed to us because they thought us a group wanting to show dirty pictures. But of course censors are always that way – the only film that Edinburgh Council ever asked to be shown in advance from the list that we had to supply of the films to be shown (Edinburgh imitated us and founded its own society) was a film that was based on a piece of music which had the same title, I think an eighteenth century piece called *In der Nacht*. The title must have made them thoroughly suspicious. With the London County Council we only narrowly got through the censorship, by pulling every conceivable string, with voting something like 57 to 53 or 47 to 43. The press wasn't even very welcoming. They objected to being asked to give up their weekends and come and see a film on Sunday. There were also journalists who were after sensation. For example, the *Express*, who encouraged me when I went to the Soviet Union for the British Museum on a zoological expedition to try and get Soviet films. They said 'your idea of the Film Society will never be of any use to anybody unless you get Russian films'. Well I didn't succeed in getting them then, but I came back to find an enormous attack on me and on the Film Society, saying that I had had a diplomatic passport and had smuggled Russian films into Britain, and that kind of thing. We had to have a libel action.

*Close Up*<sup>5</sup> was obviously very much taken with the German film and the Russian film. Did the screening of those films at the LFS and the criticism in *Close Up* have any influence on British film making?

Not until a great deal later. A new generation grew up with a wider perspective. What did happen at once was that, as is usual, film magnates tried to cotton on to anything that was successful, and to use it. For example if a film was very much praised, they would try and engage the star or the director and make them do something totally unsuitable, or miscast the stars. Americans of course did that deliberately, they could afford to, and often miscast people, ruined them, made them unpopular and then sent them back home. In England, it wasn't quite like that. People did not have enough money; they hoped they would be successful. And there were exceptions like George Pearson.<sup>6</sup> I don't know that it shows in his work but he was a very keen and decent man with high principles and some kind of education. He was not like a lot of them who could not make their mark on contracts or sign their names. Mick Balcon was another, although he was working for a company which put pressure on Adrian Brunel<sup>7</sup> (who was one of the pioneers with us in the Film Society), so that he was forced to resign from all connection with the Society, or he would never have been allowed to make another picture. He helped us in every conceivable way and we worked from his office, but his name did not appear on

our notepaper. These were the sort of pressures that were brought to bear. 75

*What was the relationship of the group that formed the Film Society? You put it casually, that you met Hugh Miller, but were they a group of people who knew each other already?*

We met at parties. I can't remember how I met Iris Barry, but she brought in Sidney Bernstein. Sidney Bernstein brought in Frank Dobson. I don't know whether Hugh Miller brought in Adrian Brunel; Sidney also brought in McKnight-Kauffer. Dulac also came in. They were people in different cultural fields interested in the cinema. And Mycroft – of course he mustn't be forgotten – of the *Evening Standard*. He was associated with us from the start.<sup>8</sup>

*Would it be fair to describe it as a social grouping – I mean that you knew each other socially rather than culturally or . . .*

No, culturally, because we hadn't high society people in at all, except as relatives. Wells and Shaw immediately came in and helped; they gave it their names. We founded a non-profit making Society with a pound a year guarantee share paid up, with the little group I've named as directors. We formed a limited company and this owned the Society. And we ran it entirely democratically, re-electing the people each year for its committee and so forth, and discussing policy with them.

*Would you say that Close Up accurately reflected the taste and interests of the Film Society.*

No. No I would say in this sense they would run parallel. Later, after we were successful, two or three years later, Herring joined as a director, as far as I remember, and of course we brought in Grierson and Anthony Asquith. We always tried to see that there were no groups outside who were approximately similar to our thinking. The only thing that preceded us that I know of was Vieux Colombier – you know they had a cinema.<sup>9</sup> When we started, I went over and saw the Vieux Colombier people to try and find out what sort of films they were getting and from where. When we approached people to get films we would say to them: we're not going to pay you anything, but for heaven's sake don't give us the picture unless and until you find that you can't sell it to anybody else. And of course this made them think we were liars – the first reaction being not that we were mad and eccentric, which might have been reasonable, but that we were liars trying to swindle them out of everything. It seemed so incomprehensible.

*Were you talking about American films at that time or was it exclusively the . . .?*

*Could you give us some idea what kind of films these were?*

Yes, well we began with *Waxworks*. And we went on with things that did not pass the censor like *Caligari*, but we showed it uncut. We showed the whole of *Dr Mabuse*, both parts stuck together. Also *Greed*, we revived *Greed*, and we revived for instance Sjöström's first American picture *Emperor of Portugalia*. And we showed anything that hadn't had an opportunity to be seen and properly reviewed before. Now this meant very few English pictures. Walter Summers gave us a picture from British Instructional, because we knew British Instructional well. Another thing we did was to try to show the potentialities of the medium – we ran a number of *Secrets of Nature* films<sup>10</sup> and compared them with scientific films which exhibited particular techniques that showed the powers of cinema. We began to be known and to have a certain influence. For example Hitchcock was always interested in our pictures though I hadn't made his acquaintance.

One day Mick (Balcon) asked me to lunch at the Monaco (I remember I ate fried onions and mashed potatoes because I was a vegetarian at that time). Mick asked me to see *The Lodger* to consider editing and titling it. Hitch had by then made three pictures. Hitch was subject to exactly the same feeling from the British trade and his immediate bosses as the Film Society. There was the most bitter jealousy between everybody in his studio including the white-haired boy Cutts who directed the successful *Rat* pictures with Novello.<sup>11</sup> The worst thing for anybody in the film industry in those days to overcome was the 'I knew him when'. Hitch had started drawing the letters for titles, not writing the titles, and then he became an assistant director and when it was a question of his being a director, all the other directors felt that they would be belittled if this fellow came up, irrespective of what his talents were. It wasn't jealousy of his talents at that time, you didn't know what kind of pictures he was going to make, but the people who are already in place don't like others being promoted.

Hitch had made three pictures. The first they wouldn't show because they didn't think it was good enough; the second the same. The distributor was entirely in the pocket of and conversed with and felt more comfortable with, types like Cutts than types like Hitch. Then he had done *The Lodger*. And they wouldn't show that either. They had investments in three pictures wrapped up and the distributor refusing to show them, and Mick in the weak position of being in charge of a production company whose distributor wouldn't show three pictures by a man in whom Mick had placed his confidence. They were in complete despair. The argument ran something like: they won't show these pictures because they're too highbrow but don't let's destroy what we've got by changing it from

what it is, but rather see what we can do if we handle it in a more highbrow way. I am sure that was why I was called. Brunel was never given a picture to do but he'd been under contract with the studio for a long time and he must have suggested it. They said would I do it and if necessary re-shoot it, or arrange with Hitch for things to be re-shot. Hitch was awfully nice about it, he could have been very bad-tempered and irritated, but he wasn't. He did re-shoot one or two shots and I completely re-titled it, without any original thoughts, but simply pinching ideas from other pictures and things like that; after all, most original ideas have just been pinched unconsciously.

*What sort of pictures were you pinching from?*

Well, one of these was *The Gold Rush*, and the other was *Shadows*.<sup>12</sup> You see with *Shadows* we'd seen a picture without any titles at all which mean that you had a successfully sinister atmosphere without interrupting it with titles. Long titles especially came as an interruption to the sort of hypnotism of the silent film. *The Lodger* was an enormous success with the Press. It had a sort of influence and I think it opened the door for a number of young people to come into the industry. All the people who had been working with Brunel and Montagu Ltd,<sup>13</sup> all those I had been associated with at University, started to come in. It was very interesting indeed. Adrian and I felt a certain amount of joy and self-satisfaction though we noticed that when talkies did come in everyone we'd employed was in work and we were the only ones out of work.

It took that amount of time. When you were saying 'did it influence . . .' I said not at first, but gradually people began to see . . . You must remember that there was a lot to be said on their side. It wasn't a matter just of will, of not appreciating something that is beautiful, or effective or intelligent. The whole industry in those days was far less structured than it is now to deal with anything out of the ordinary. People were regular film-goers. Three or four times a week was quite common; hardly anybody went less than once or twice a week. It was a sort of weekly dose and pictures couldn't stay on long because there was such a lot in the pipeline. The cinemas were largely under the control – although not so much as they became a little later – of the distributors. You had to give a regular diet. Anything irregular, even if it was liked by the public, could ruin the exhibitor.

After talkies came in Flaherty's *Man of Aran* was made. Flaherty was an intelligent man and unlike most other creative artists who, when they've finished a picture, are no longer interested in what happens to it, he was interested. People who were intelligent and who wanted to make a second picture realised that it was a job to make a success. Flaherty went round everywhere trying to get his picture booked. The chief distributor, C M Woolf, was the same

78 man who was down on Hitch (when we wrote the script of *Thirty Nine Steps*, Mick was in America and before he came back, Woolf, as soon as he read the script cancelled the production, gave Hitch and me notice and put us on adapting a musical by someone called Phillips, called *The Floradora Girl*. Mick came back in time to restore *Thirty Nine Steps*, but I mean that was the sort of level of influence the distributors had). They were not entirely wrong. Flaherty by going round from cinema to cinema and locality to locality would arrange that *Man of Aran* did extremely well in each cinema that it was shown. He approached the local gentry; he did everything he could for snob, intellectual, educational appeal on the *Man of Aran*. It was that sort of a picture, it appealed to those sort of people. They would come in and the figures would not be bad for that particular show. But what happened? The regular visitors, the regular people who patronised the cinema every week would not come, or if they came, were so disgusted that it wasn't what they wanted to embody their dreams and identify with and see sexual and social triumph in the identified figure, that they would go off to the other cinema or swear they would never go back and it would take weeks for the cinema that showed *Man of Aran* to win back its audience.

*But Hitchcock's movies are more like 'the other cinema' than Man of Aran.*

They were, but the distributors were afraid. People might have said 'we didn't like so and so because it's unusual'. You must remember what was said about the close-up when Griffith brought it in. The crowds are supposed to have shouted 'Show us their feet!' They thought that they weren't getting their money's worth because it was an unfamiliar technique. One of the things the distribution company was afraid of in what was quite an ordinary theme of Hitchcock's, one of the two films he made in Germany, *The Pleasure Garden*, was that he had a shot either directly above or below chorus girls going down an open iron staircase. It was thought that this would make people sea-sick. You saw this kind of thing in German films where Hitch no doubt picked it up, but not in English films. English people weren't accustomed to it. It was not just theme but style. Then again *The Lodger*, with all its sinisterness; what they feared would be objected to in it was that a man who was a popular hero, Ivor Novello, with whom everybody identified and every woman wanted to identify for sexual purposes (or to be more exact, for the purposes of sexual dream) should play a sinister character who's thought to be murdering everybody. It wasn't in their eyes compensated for by the happy ending when it turned out he wasn't after all. The distributors thought it would be repulsive to the public.

*But was this just a question of the distributors? I mean, what*

*seems rather curious is that if this situation prevailed in England, why didn't a similar situation prevail in the United States or in Germany? Why was it so different in Germany, for example, than here?* 79

Well I can't really tell you, but you must appreciate that the Americans ruled the cinema, that there was no large independent British cinema. There was an inheritance of a pre-war independent English cinema, but this had died very largely during the war as far as commercial films were concerned. If you were running twice or sometimes thrice weekly changes with double feature programmes, you wanted 300 pictures – nearly all were changed at least once a week – you would want an average of say 200, and it might be as many as 300 pictures, a year. You couldn't get those from England. It would have meant a loss to English investment.

*But the American films were rather more inventive than English films.*

Well I think that that was simply spin-off from two things; the importation of foreign talent which fertilised it a bit before it took root, and, not to decry native talent, the fact that the more pictures you make the more margin there is for variety.

*But it does seem that the English industry was particularly conservative. So even if you say about the Americans that they were willing to invite Swedish or German directors there was that kind of openness.*

The point I am trying to make is that the English cinema was dependent entirely on American films. I would however take it culturally further. I remember the first international film festival that I went to abroad, the English films all advertised their wares in English. They said that if people wanted to buy their films they should learn English. That was the mentality of the people in films. Now the people who started the American film industry from the business point of view were immigrants. They had a European background. There you have a clue to the wider scene. They worked as clothing manufacturers and that sort of thing and they were a damn sight better for the cinema than these banks and business and insurance people put in since, who ruined it because they don't understand the showmanship angle at all. These immigrants came with a bit of a dream and a bit of a showmanship feeling, however vulgar and uneducated. (I use the word not contemptuously but merely to indicate a limited range of variety of background that they couldn't avoid). They had come from Europe so they knew there were more things in heaven and earth than the English lot dreamt of, as it were. Now the English strength, and it was a strength, and

80 it occurred even in films that were very very simple, the things of which Pearson was perhaps the climax, the last example of films that were very 'English' and had a feeling, because people always prefer their native product, because they can identify with it better. Even bad English films would do as well as American films for the same investment and so on, because people identify more easily.

*I thought that it really was the case that the American films were just intensely popular in Britain and British films were not.*

No. No. This was an illusion that was spread. The financial set up was always so odd. You take for example, when we made *The Man Who Knew Too Much* (1934); Hitch said – you're not making it for the public because by the time the public sees it it doesn't really matter what happens to it. The main thing is the public will never see it if the distributor doesn't like it. Are you making it for the Press? He decided that you were making it for the Press, and the trade was quite right in smelling this out and feeling that he was trying to get good notices. Though I worked on all those pictures with Hitch and I was devoted to him because it was a great chance to work with somebody who was thinking intelligently about films (and there weren't many in England at that time), we used to quarrel and one of things we used to quarrel about chiefly was that I used to cut out things that I didn't think were successful. He wanted to have them in because they would have got good press notices. For example, when he had a scene with the husband and wife and a third party to the triangle, coming back from the theatre and he wanted to show the lover and the wife touching knees in the taxi. He showed a shot from above. But he used the wrong lens and you would have been viewing from a helicopter, if you'd had a helicopter in those days, with no roof on the taxi and to my mind it destroyed the illusion entirely. I always used to quarrel with him on those sort of grounds but it didn't matter to him, everyone would have said 'what a wonderful and original shot'. And he was right. As you could tell from Danston's audience questionnaire: 'Who is your favourite director?' – the only English director the public had heard of was Hitchcock. Most of the others were American names that had been publicised. The public generally did not know who directed the films they saw, but they had seen Hitchcock's name in the Press. The result was that every group that was floating a new company during the Quota Act wanted Hitch under contract in order to attract money. Hitch was able to go from company to company improving his position and contract each time. This is the way his career was made. I'm not suggesting that his films didn't occasionally get a very great public response as for example *The Man Who Knew Too Much*, but you can get a good public response without having a good career in the film business. He thought it out. He was intelligent and worked in that

sort of way.

What I'm trying to show you is how difficult it was. The trade, you see, couldn't offend the Americans. When Gaumont-British was created everybody said, here is a group with a big circuit and they will at last be able to fight the American circuits, but they couldn't. They couldn't get enough British films. They were even more dependent on the Americans because they were so big and they had more cinemas. When, later on after the war, Cripps tried to benefit the British film industry by putting on that tax and the Americans stopped supplying any films so that the cinemas had only old films to show and British films, we went on a delegation from the union and expected the British film industry to say: 'Ah, now we will make more British films', but they wouldn't. They were only too anxious to get this protective tax off so that they could get the American films back in. The Americans cancelled their boycott, not because it was successful, but because the public was going just as often to the cinema to see revivals.

People don't go to the cinema so much now because they've got alternatives. I remember in Spain during the war, all the cinemas were packed although the films were old and had been revived and were scratchy and falling apart and so on. It's the experience of getting away from home and having warmth and music and forgetting the outside world and it doesn't matter terribly much how the film does. In competing for the proportion of total money spent on entertainment it depends on your rivals, the weather and all those kinds of things. The only success you get is as against another film. And that's another thing that the film industry didn't fully understand. I remember I came back – this is an entirely irrelevant anecdote but shows how those sorts of things work – I came back from my first visit to the Soviet Union, not not first, the first after the war, where I saw they were still using tiny, poky little cinemas with tiny screens and there were no big cinemas at all. I discovered that most of my Soviet friends had never seen their glorious pictures and wonderful compositions on a big screen as we had and I realised that this was what gave the Soviet cinema freedom to create great pictures. They had a different system of distribution. What ruined the British film industry was this dependence on American films. When the Americans made a picture that everybody wanted to see, like a new Charlie Chaplin or a new Fairbanks or Pickford or whatever it might be, British distributors would be desperate to get it. They would take it as a 'loss leader'. For example take Charlie's *City Lights* (1931). When it went on – it was *City Lights* I think – at the Dominion Theatre, the company agreed to pay as rental 105 or 110 per cent of the take because the more they paid the more it proved that the picture had helped in establishing that theatre as a new centre for people to go to in rivalry with all the others in the West End. It was worth it to them to get a picture even at a loss. They would all bid up like that



82 against one another to get the big picture and in order to be able to bid they would make bigger bricks and mortar and when they had the bricks and mortar they *had* to have pictures that would be enormously successful. Even if they were popular they couldn't fill it for more than a few days and the result was that you had this system of showing pictures only for a week or less and very seldom having first runs, that is you sometimes had a bit of a first run, but it wasn't only in the West End, every town had its big cinema, its White Elephant, and you had to fill it. And not only that but if you had to fill it that meant you had to get fifty big pictures a year if you were going to run each for a week. Whereas if you had a small cinema, and the picture cottoned on, you could run it for several months, and you only needed a dozen pictures in the year and that could return so much more money to the producer rather than it all having to go to the exhibitor. Also a big whack went back to the distributor in the old days. And you see it didn't matter whether it was a good or bad film because if there was a new one coming every week or twice a week, who would have time to find out if it was a good picture or not! That's what made the star system, you may have seen the star before, you've never seen the film before. You went perhaps ten per cent for the title and ninety per cent for the stars, the kind of thing that gave them self-identification and dreams.

Only American pictures could supply enough for Britain and when talkies came in American domination increased. In all foreign countries the American film had to be changed and the change of language of course means that except the spectacle or the sex picture it doesn't work. The more it depends upon acting or characterisation, the more it loses because even if you get it in the title you haven't time to watch the face and see the title at the same time. It always happens. The other day the Mongolians showed me a film and I said: this is marvellous, very, very good, and they said: Do you think we could show it in England? and I said: No, hopeless. It was a very well acted domestic picture of domestic life. That you can't do with talkies; but you see in England, American is more widely understood in Britain than any particular English intonation. The American is classless and American is better understood in Scotland than Scots is in England. Any picture you produce in England is a local, a dialect picture even for the British market and so the Americans dominated even more when talkies came in than they had before.

*Do you think if it would have been possible to be free of the American influence it would have been beneficial to the British industry?*

Without question.

*In what way?*

Well because people wanted cinema entertainment in those days and they would have had to get it from England. 83

*Yes, but you talk for instance about the conservatism of English distributors and people like C M Woolf, you don't think there was a kind of basic conservatism built into the English industry?*

No, because I think most of the American scene was like that too. Only as I say they looked to abroad as well. That was the advantage they had and the English didn't look abroad.

*But that's surely very important isn't it? The fact the Americans were willing to learn from the Germans and the Swedes and the Russians . . . ?*

Oh yes.

*Whereas the British don't seem to have been very willing to learn.*

Yes, I would agree that you have a point there, but all the same if they hadn't had the Americans they would have had to get things.

*They didn't seem to learn from the Americans though.*

Well, you couldn't afford to buy the Americans, but you see you didn't get to see the American films until they were the sort of top films that came in, except for the rubbish that was never reviewed. Every country produces rubbish of course that no other country sees. Every country's reputation abroad is much higher than it is at home for the quality of its films.

*Can we talk a bit about the development of the London Film Society. You were I think absent from England for . . .*

I went away for a year.

*A year. Was there much change in attitudes?*

No. We'd lined up our pictures. There wasn't much change in that first year. I was in Hollywood for a year, you see.

*But right throughout the thirties, was there much change do you think?*

No, you see, what happened was there began to be wider influence coming out of the London Film Society. We began to get this cinema, the Academy, to take some pictures. When you said to me did we have an influence, all this had been an explanation of my

84 first remark, 'not immediately'. Later, yes, this developed, certainly, but it was a very delayed influence. The people who had seen our films at the Society began to go into the industry and they themselves influenced choices. More open-minded people began to come into some of the distribution organisations.

*The people associated with the Film Society, what kind of response did they have to directors like Hitchcock or indeed to the American cinema? The impression I get from Close Up is a very stolid kind of concern with what one might now characterise as the 'art movie', the European 'art movie', rather dismissive of anything produced in England and totally ignoring most of the productions in the United States. That is a very narrow kind of...*

I think to be fair you have to see two strands. I don't want to criticise *Close Up* in that respect but I would entirely agree with you about *Close Up* in the sense that I think they did like those things and I think its pay-off comes in the British Film Institute's programme to a large extent. But let's be fair on the other side. Into all these things goes a great, great deal of amateur effort. By that I don't mean crude and incapable, but I mean work for love, the literal sense of amateur. People don't want to do anything, as I already said, that somebody else is going to do. If the other people are going to show the American stuff you don't spend all your time doing it. And if the critics are all writing about American films you don't write about them. Now we in the Film Society never had that sort of feeling. The fact that we had very close contact with people who ran cinemas like Bernstein, people who were popular film critics like Iris Barry and Mycroft, that alone would have saved us if it hadn't been that a number of us were reasonable social people with a good deal of social commonsense. We never had that sort of outlook. We would keep on sometimes reviving bits and trying to show people what people had been interested in. For example when I went on, as I did later, on the Film Archive Selection Committee of the BFI, I remember again and again staggering the Committee by urging that something should be included because it was a popular success and that seemed to us just as important in the history of the cinema as the fact that it might have some art element in it. But as for showing and writing about the cinema we were crusaders, propagandists for something that would otherwise have been neglected and ignored. So that I think that you have to see the two strands and before you blame any particular person, before any blame of mine is allowed to be anything more than a suspicion or a prejudice you should realise the situation. People might have been a clique but they might have looked like a clique even though they had completely open ideas. Indeed I used to go around saying the American cinema was the best in the world and the only reason why I was more interested in

the Soviet cinema was because the Soviet cinema was self-conscious. The American cinema didn't know what it was doing and produced marvellous results like people who bred animals before the science of genetics and produced more remarkable animals in the domestic dogs and horses than anybody else with genetics since. The Russians who studied the science of cinema tried to find out why things were good or bad or effective or non-effective. I being a scientist was interested in the Russians for that reason, not because I regarded them as superior. Most of us were like that, so that a person might appear to be a part of a clique because his work leads him, his catholicity leads him into the only field that is neglected. Is that a fair point?

*It's not so much personal responsibility as a kind of structural thing you choose your task as making films available that aren't available normally. British and American films are pretty much available in this country, but even within the system of exhibition, you get some cinemas which show British and American films and other cinemas which – starting with the Academy and now growing into something much wider – show European art films. That curiously becomes sedimented into the structure.*

No, you see that is what is happening now and that is because the cinema has been forced to turn to smaller sized cinemas. Because of the decrease in the total number of people going to the cinema, which depends largely on the development of television, largely but not wholly. The total output is less, therefore you cannot change the programme so often at the cinema and you have to find ways of making a picture stand up. And the way of doing that is to find smaller cinemas and smaller audiences, so without having used the test of simple arithmetic which I used, the cinema trade by its experiences is coming to this business of splitting up its big cinemas into three or four auditoria and that sort of thing. Now this leads, as you say, to segregation. But on the other hand you have that segregation in literature too don't you? I don't see that you can do any more with a culture, I mean any better with a culture, so long as you have a class structure and a class structure which reflects itself in differences of taste and differences of perspective and all that sort of thing because of the opportunities people have of developing taste, that you can do anything more than build up the widest and most flexible system that you can which will cater for everybody.

*It is the peculiar nature, though, of the tastes of this class structure, as opposed say to France, where the American cinema has been fantastically influential in the kinds of films they've produced, whereas the upper and middle class response to popular cinema here has on the whole been very, well not negative, but quite negative.*

86 Well, you must remember that the cinema when it started thought it was going to be international, because it was silent and it could change these titles and so on. It ceased to be so when talkies came in and then this domination in England ceased, but when the failure of the cinema came we began to get a wider thing. I mean I look around at the films being made by British people, English people, and its fantastic the variety and the themes and things, it's not a question of liberty but it is a question of the style of things. You see, take for example, Mick Balcon who as a man was very very pleasant and very nice to work with and a joy I think for a lot of other people, but you know, everybody has their quirks and their difficulties and so forth, but I remember I couldn't get him for years to make a costume picture because he'd made one which was a flop. And now people are making costume pictures all over the place, *Mary, Queen of Scots*, and *The Charge of the Light Brigade* were two pictures I was very anxious to make and I couldn't get anywhere near either of them. And now dozens are being made, almost every year someone does something like that but all these things were absolutely excluded. Well you could never make a picture that had an unhappy ending. You see, things were rigid when you had this regular visitation thing, things were absolutely rigid in the cinema. It's in that atmosphere that the Hitchcock pictures must be seen and defined. Now they wouldn't be notable in any way.

*Can we talk a bit about your role with the Hitchcock films, with The Man Who Knew Too Much? How did your involvement actually come about?*

Well my involvement came about in this way. I went to America with Eisenstein but quarrelled with him and left before the Mexican expedition; I came back here and plunged into political work. I hadn't joined the Communist Party before . . .

*This is about what year?*

1929-30. I hadn't joined the Communist Party before then. I had worked closely with it from boyhood, and was a member of the British Socialist Party which was ancestral to the Communist Party. But I hadn't joined, I did about 1929-30. I started working on *The Daily Worker*, and Mick got onto me because he had another crisis like *The Lodger*. This was a quite different one. He was doing a re-make at Beaconsfield of a musical by Carmine Gallone with Martha Eggert, and they discovered that they couldn't get the floor schedule down below whatever the figure was and it was going to cost them too much. It was just an accident that all his staff were busy that he had to go outside for a somebody, and was reluctant in an emergency to go outside for somebody he didn't know. So:

What was I doing? Could I come there? and so on. I was a person who by good fortune didn't have to, or hadn't got the habit of speaking as modestly as perhaps from the point of view of employment in the film business prospective employers expected me to. And I said that this picture can't go on the floor and that we must cut out so and so. And they said that it must go on the floor, if the studio is empty for one week it will cost £5,000, and you know in those days pictures didn't cost more than £40-£50,000 to make and so it was quite considerable. And I said, No, I can cut much more out of it but I must have a week to do it in. And I got the job of associate producer on it and cut the script and so on and we did that.

And then: Would I work with Hitch? He'd been made to do a musical which had flopped and so I came back on that. I was working then with a German in the anti-fascist struggle who was a friend of Peter Lorre's so we got Peter Lorre for *The Man Who Knew Too Much*.

*At what stage was The Man Who Knew Too Much when you became involved with it? I mean had Hitchcock decided already to make that?*

No. That was really an original of Hitchcock's. You see Charles Bennett had the credit for story-making in that but you see what happened with Hitch's stories was that he would want an amanuensis. He originally used Alma Reville on a lot of these things. He would have the idea, but I don't mean to say at all he couldn't, he wouldn't, it wasn't his style of work, to put pen to paper. He wanted a screen writer to talk to and the screen writer would get the credit. The screen writer and the associate producer who was me or anybody else we brought in would throw out ideas. Hitch would go around London and he'd see something from a bus, he would go, for example, to the Albert Hall. We would work these into the stories. And that's how he would get the atmosphere of local scenes and local sets, and the sets would develop collaboratively like that. The writer would be given the credit because Mick wouldn't allow associate producers to have any credit at all.

*That series of pictures, I mean Thirty Nine Steps and Secret Agent, was that ad hoc and based on the success of The Man Who Knew Too Much or did you have a conception of that kind of film?*

No, we had a conception that Hitch wanted to go back and make those kind of pictures. He always liked those kind more. He'd gone away to the others. He'd tried to make ambitious pictures, you know they did the Galsworthy and the Sean O'Casey and things like that and they were no worse than other people's pictures but they had no Hitchcock . . . What he had specially to contribute

88 was a sense of tension which comes from suggestion and a sense of suggestion in composition because he was always a superb visual director and he never built an inch of the set that wasn't needed for the shot, which he'd worked out beforehand. Many of the British producers in those days used to build a four-walled set, stand in the middle of it and make up their minds what the action was to be, and then move away the wall that got in the way. And that of course was very expensive to build so that our scripts would always be estimated at much dearer than the pictures actually cost.

Mick would be inclined to make pictures that his contract directors wanted to make. They would ask to do a thing and he would say no or yes but they would be expected to make suggestions. Every now and then he would get sold a picture or story by somebody else or by the distributor pressing it or by it being a part of a big deal in some other way with some other company, and then the position would be that the unfortunate associate producers would be asked 'who will take this?' and everybody tried to get out of it. Hitch could choose his own picture and we were choosing these sort of pictures to go back to.

*But when you say 'he wanted to go back', you mean films like The Lodger and Blackmail I take it. He had in mind those kinds of films?*

Yes, that's right, of course yes.

*But what is striking about the middle thirties films is that they are much less portentous. I mean The Lodger does have a certain 'art' quality to it, whereas the thirties films don't have that kind of pretension.*

Well *The Lodger* was made directly under the influence of the German films. You see, Hitch was working in Munich on the previous two and he'd seen the pictures of the Film Society and it was made directly under the influence of the German films, I think there's no doubt about that. Of course he had a German actress in *Blackmail* but what really made *Blackmail* what it was was the fact that it became a talkie half way through so that what he had to think of was ingenious ways of saving the silent picture with a certain amount of talk and it became the best talkie to that date, because it was the only one in which the whole picture wasn't shot in blimp – that really was the accident that gave it its character.

*But would it be true to say that he had drifted away from the kind of influence of the German cinema and the 'art' cinema by the time he came to make The Man Who Knew Too Much?*

Well I would say he had become his own man in the sense that he

always wanted to take the suspense and the dramatic contrast from incidents of everyday life. He was trying to strike the public with incidents and settings with which they could identify – ‘that could happen to me’. In fact it’s an interesting thing that his secretary of a later time, Harrison, married Eric Ambler, because that’s what Ambler always does in his books. But I think that’s just a coincidence. I don’t think there was anything special in that although she was a very able woman and later directed pictures. In our stories and things she didn’t seem to play a very constructive role. She was learning at that time.

*The interest that Hitchcock puts on the editing, was that another self-developed thing? I mean, you think immediately, well he must have been familiar with the Russians to put so much weight on editing as the kind of crucial thing in film making.*

No. Well, yes and no. The point is that no, I would bring that to another influence. That was his youth. You see, he began as a visual man, that is to say, designing the letters on the cards, and then, I don’t know, I don’t think he became an art director but he was the art director on every film and the editor of the film before he began. As he explains, the picture was finished for him when the script was finished. He visualised every shot, designing the set for the shots he wanted to have on it. The art director only carried out what he was told to do, what he was told to build.

Hitch said that at every phase of a film you have to have your plan of campaign worked out. You have to analyse your subject and before you begin you must be able to express it in a single sentence and then everything you do develops an aspect of that guiding subject, that guiding sentence. When you are on the floor you work out *exactly* what you’re going to do. Hitchcock edited in the writing of a script and carried out that editing process in filming. It was entirely the director’s thing; I think that was why he was so reluctant to accept criticism from me in the later stages of a film.

*You joined the Communist Party in 1929; did you have any idea of trying to make a political effort in films at all?*

I did make some political films as you know.

*But at that time?*

No. I knew that I couldn’t make political statements in films that would reach the general public because of all the barriers that there were. Nowadays you can get a certain amount in. I used to be derisive towards my dear friends and really noble characters, many of them of the documentary film world, who had such an important influence and did really magnificent work in documentary, out-



90 standing on a world scale, because in the political sense they were working for either Government sponsors or rich multi-million companies and they would sit in the projection theatre saying: Look what I managed to put in there! Well they could see it, but the public never could. To reach the screen you had to be so restrained with it. They got away with that film that was made about rents (*Housing Problems*) but it was so rare, so rare. Really it was impractical. Take for instance Basil Wright making *Song of Ceylon*, a lovely picture, or making the Post Office things. They were political films for those days. They were teaching the English who hadn't thought of it that alien people far away and of another colour had a culture and a beauty and a music that they had never thought of. Normally they would never think of it. The Documentary films were teaching people that working class people were human beings. The only working class person you saw on the screen was the kind that my mother would say she always had the best relations with – how nice the station master was when she was down on the platform at Southampton and how well she got on with the people at Fortnum and Masons. You never saw anything on the screen except a butler pouring out a drink. Mind you, they weren't always caricatures any more than they were in the Conan Doyle stories.

*It was a curious politics, the politics of documentary.*

What they did do was that they showed the working class as human beings and people worthy of respect. I was busy working in politics as a vocation. I did things related to film in the anti-fascist struggle. We brought films in on Spain and made films and so forth and fought the censor tooth and nail. We made a little film called *Britain Expects* about the bombing of Potato Jones who ran the blockade up to Bilbao and then no cinema would put it on; it was five minutes long and it couldn't have kept the audience out of the cinema. We used every influence we could; I managed to get the Duchess of Atholl to persuade the ABC to try it in six theatres. The reason the trade refused to put it on was that they said it wasn't the sort of film the British public wanted. No controversy was ever supposed to come into the cinema and they said that there would be riots in the cinema, wherever it was shown and then they showed the managers' reports and these all said what they'd obviously tipped them to say, you know, about how the audience didn't like this very much, they seemed bored. How can you tell if an audience is bored in a five-minute film? You couldn't get political films on, but you would fight, we did fight. But you see, on my little film on Madrid (*Defence of Madrid*) we collected about £6,000. The point is how did we do that? You can't collect money to make film. The film cost us only a few hundred pounds, it was on 16mm and there were things we had to find out of our own pockets and you can't go round collecting money to reimburse the

people who put up the money for it. We collected money for the Medical Aid – people will pour the money out for a film then because it's a thing that touches their hearts. But you can't do that commercially. But I expect the same people would have resented it if they'd gone to the cinema expecting to be entertained and had seen *Defence of Madrid*.

*Where was that screened in fact?*

Oh, halls Co-op halls and things like that, because they're outside the censorship you see.

*Did you try to set up any kind of distribution network?*

Yes, we set up a thing and, in order to snub the British Film Institute, we called it the Progressive Film Institute. And again we approached the Russians with the old slogan 'please give us any films you can't get anybody else to show'. So we showed quite a number of excellent pictures that way. We used the Forum Cinema in Villiers Street just before the war, and we made those Spanish films and I made a film for the Party, *Peace and Plenty*. We showed that at the House of Commons. The Tories walked around saying: 'Why can't we make pictures like these?'

*It is very striking seeing Peace and Plenty. It is stylistically very different from the sort of film which the Documentary Movement was making, more kind of agit-prop than documentary.*

I still feel that violent caricature and violent political contrast, the simple thing, has a certain effect. I'm told that *October* was shown in Paris two or three years ago and everybody was astounded because they said this was an entirely new way of film making simply because of the number of cuts in it and the alternation of things which gave no time for people to be bored in any way. But the film industry very rarely revives its stuff, only the old stars, it rarely revives a film . . .

*What was your own response to the Documentary Movement, the kind of films which they made?*

The only films I ever directed, first and last, were documentary. But I felt that the Documentary Movement was a very exploited field. People were paying and accepting salaries under the Union rates because they were keen to work on this at all costs. The documentary people could never get the sort of money people received for feature films. But the trouble was that the documentary people began to feel they were superior in some way because they were working for art. The reason they distinguished between art

92 and non-art as equivalent to documentary and non-documentary was because they were taking less wages, so it must be art.

*When you made Peace and Plenty, were you conscious you were modelling that to some extent on the Russian films?*

No, not at all. I did it in the style of how I'd write an article, a literary article, and then translated it into visual terms. The logic of it would be the logic of if I'd sat down to write a pamphlet or a leading article on the necessity of overthrowing the Chamberlain Government for the harm it was doing in England and internationally. I never thought of anybody else's films. How much unconscious influences come in, I don't know.

*Your own sense of Peace and Plenty – 'caricature and violent contrast' – brings it quite close to a Russian silent film.*

Well I used an enormous number of stills. We found stills with each of the politicians in some utterly ludicrous position. For example Chamberlain in a top hat, in a conservatory, in this attitude (Montague mimed it) looking at a bunch of grapes.

*Very reminiscent of Kerensky in October.*

I didn't want an actor, I wanted to have the real people. I thought it would carry more conviction to an English audience. It's the style of the cinema to carry conviction, but it's not exaggerated because this was in fact Chamberlain. But I did do other things. For example, Elsa Lanchester's mother who was a great puppet master made me a beautiful puppet of Chamberlain which we used. I had thought to myself, English audiences don't like documentaries, and I'm going to give them an argument in the film that they won't be necessarily particularly sympathetic to it – so I will try every moment to give them something else to entertain them, so they won't have time to be bored. That's how all those sort of things came in.

*What's very curious is that the Documentary Movement self-confessedly took things from the Russians, but they characterised the Russian films as very 'realistic'. But yours is quite the reverse of theirs. Yours was, when you think of it, agit-prop.*

Yes, well agit-prop didn't go into the Russian cinema, certainly not into Russian documentary. The Russian documentary became lyrical. The English documentary was more didactic. They kept on trying to teach things, and the Russians didn't like the English documentary at first. The Russians had a number of poets doing documentary and then when they gave up doing documentary, it reached an all-

time low. They tried to do lyric things without any sense of rhythm. And they never to my mind mastered the instructional thing which is why when the best English documentaries about weather and things like that went over there they were far better than anything the Russians were making at the time. They also did not use caricature in documentary because the documentary to them was naturalism. As documentary developed, the misinterpretation of socialist realism as naturalism became popular. Because documentary seems a 'document' you make it more plausible by using natural objects. So I'd never seen caricature in Russian documentary and I never knew until much later about Russian caricature cinema.

The English documentary boys were influenced by quick cutting (the idea of montage) and by the fact that by cutting they could create new things. You must remember the most influential of all the things in all cinema, English and American, even the commercial cinema, I dare say, was the Pudovkin book that I translated. I was once in an aeroplane coming back from Hamburg, very crowded American aircraft, and the man next to me turned out to be a film director who was just finishing one of the big films made in India – the name might come back to me if I heard it but I've forgotten what it was – and when he discovered, because our passports were examined, what my name was, he at once said that as a boy he had read this Pudovkin book and this had been the whole basis of his work and so on. That Pudovkin book was so simple, no Eisenstein book could have had the same influence. What is in it was pinched either from Kuleshov who taught it directly to him or from Eisenstein, but he translated it as the simple, idealist and poetic-minded person that he was, into simple language that everybody could understand, and anybody even the simplest amateur can get ideas from Pudovkin.

*What Russian films had been shown in England? I don't know what Russian films people had actually seen.*

One thing you should look at is the list of Film Society programmes in *Close Up* and there you'll find out what dates they were shown, because hardly anybody else showed any. The only ones shown before the Film Society were one or two of those made by Moscow Art Theatre actors, *Morosko* (1925) and *Polikushka* (1919) and *The Captain's Daughter*, the Pushkin story, although I'm not sure that I'm not mixing up the fact that I'd seen that, and one documentary of travel, and those were the only ones that were around before we started showing Russian films. And then a few came in that weren't shown at the Film Society or the Workers' Film Association like *The Ghost That Never Returns*. But all the other Russian films were shown at the Film Society. Bernstein and I had the idea of writing the history of the Film Society and I wanted to include in it facsimiles of all the programmes because I thought

94 that together with the contemporary programme notes and all the details of production credits they were a body of information that would be of use to students. Various publishers turned down the idea but a publisher just nibbled at it the other day, Vision Press, the people who re-did the Pudovkin thing. Just as we were arranging the contract and making all the plans we discovered that about a year ago it was pirated by an American and he's reprinted them all. So you can get a book containing facsimiles of all the programmes from this Arco press, I think. They've stolen books from everyone, from Basil Wright, from Thorold Dickinson. Thorold's caught up with them and now they're offering minimal royalties. America's outside the Copyright Act and they can steal what they like.

We began with *Mother* as far as I remember, and then we had *The End of St Petersburg*. We showed several others before we showed any Eisenstein. *Potemkin* had already been shown on 16mm; we showed it complete. We showed *October* and *The General Line* – we called it that, not the title it eventually had, *The Old and the New*.

*What about Vertov?*

Yes, we showed *Enthusiasm*. I think the 16mm people had *Kino-eye*. I can't remember whether we did, or whether he was only known through Bryher's<sup>18</sup> book. Bryher's book brought Russian film very much to the knowledge of people even if they didn't see very much of them.

*But that is what I was wondering, to what extent was it through the books and to what extent through actually seeing the films that people knew the Russian cinema?*

Bryher's book made people interested. Bryher and *Close Up* made the films known before we showed them.

*Could you say a bit more about the Progressive Film Institute?*

We founded it to try and get the miners' halls, Co-op halls and so on, with films that were related to the anti-fascist struggle and the anti-Chamberlain struggle in England. Under the law a distributor had to register. You couldn't import a film and then show it, you had to have a distributor who registered it. No cinema could show a thing unless it was registered with a distributor under the Quota Act. We formed the Progressive Film Institute for that reason. A bunch of people in the Labour movement came in and were directors of the Institute, and my wife and I ran it. We hadn't any talent for that. There are people you see who love distributing pictures, like Charlie Cooper who was concerned with Kino and had made a great

success of that.<sup>14</sup> I've seen it again and again in the Peace movement with which I am concerned, internationally. Every now and again they decide that it would be wonderful to have a film on peace and they get the greatest film directors in the world volunteering to do the films. They make the films, and nobody ever sees them, because once they've made the films they're no longer interested in them. And nobody knows how to distribute them or even how to let anybody know they exist. Nobody has a vocation except Charlie Cooper for wanting to distribute pictures, even if a few have for showing them if they could get hold of them. Stanley Forman is grand, but undertook it as a job that he was asked to do, Charlie Cooper is the only one who volunteered, as it were, got into it on purpose. We didn't like nor understood distributing. My wife worked terribly conscientiously, circularising everybody possible. Our only clients were the Cosmo, the thing that we had to start ourselves, and we carried on all through the war. Afterwards we shut up the Progressive Film Institute, we moved over to work a thing in the Soviet Embassy, the Soviet Film Agency. This distributed Soviet films during the war.

*And what were you distributing in the Progressive Film Institute?*

Well, Spanish War films.

*Some of which you had made yourself.*

Yes, and some of which we got from the Spanish people. Anti-fascist films, some of which we got from Germany or France. The pictures that I made personally for the Party like *Peace and Plenty*. We also made one or two newsreel type pictures of strikes, demonstrations by the unemployed, Party Congresses.

*Can you see any connection between your political work and your commercial films? I mean working with Balcon and Hitchcock. Did you see any connection between these two activities?*

No. I've always regarded myself as a single person. It seemed to me that one of the ways one could do work for the ideas in which one believed is by leading a creditable life, making some sort of a creditable impression in any particular profession. I had to take up the film profession because I couldn't live without earning money and that seemed to me, how wrong I was, but at the time, that seemed to be an industry with a future, that one would grow up with it. And I reckoned that if I was doing well as a film person and making pictures that were Royal Command performances or won Hollywood Academy of Motion Pictures prizes, that would spin off on the Communist Party. In the end I was blacklisted and couldn't get any employment. The Association of Cinematographic

96 Technicians you know, has a contract and employers can't fill any vacancies without consulting the office first, but when they consulted the office and my name was put forward, they laughed and I hope that it was for political and not technical reasons.

I also, of course, when the chance came, worked to build up the trade union, that was political work one could do, or social, it depends on how far you extend the word political. I never saw any contrast. I should probably never have been in films if I had had a guaranteed and assured income, but my father said he would give me an income only if he approved of what I was doing. Well, that you can't do, you see. I left zoology and went into films. I went to the *Daily Worker* and then left the *Daily* to go to Spain and then I went back to the *Daily*. I worked for the *Daily* all through the war except for the time that the *Daily* didn't come out. I couldn't get into the Forces, they wouldn't allow me in, probably because in the early days of the war when the Party was opposed to the phoney war I used to go round making speeches saying that everybody should go into the army and they should try to be the best bloody soldiers there because they couldn't expect to exercise any influence unless they were good soldiers and so probably they thought it best to keep me out.

*You did have some notion of the political cinema at the same time?*

Not under British conditions. You know, making all the films one could, but we didn't expect that . . . I don't know, you use the word cinema as if that were a sort of school. One made a particular picture for the Party because the Party asked for one for a particular campaign, that was all. The Party man who was running the Party's campaign against Chamberlain wanted *Peace and Plenty*.

*But that wasn't the same situation as, say, Defence of Madrid?*

Well, it was, yes. When the war started it suddenly occurred to us that the best way we could help the Spanish Republicans was to make known what was happening to them. So I rushed over there.

*So it was conceived as reportage?*

That's right. I went over with Norman McLaren. He was my cameraman. We took two 16mm cassette Kodak cameras. We rushed around, I can't photograph for toffee, but it was better to have two than one. And we took all we possibly could and then rushed back. And I cut it down at Harrow, I think that was the first time that Kodak had ever let anyone do it. But I said I'm going to put out a film and I'm going to show it round the country and this will redound to the possibilities of using 16mm and I consider that we hit on what the Americans later did. You see we did it all

in colour. The colour picture has disappeared now. But I remember that the burning of the palace of the Duke was very nice in colour. And the Americans later in the war took all their war documentaries on 16mm because they discovered that the grain is smaller on Kodachrome than it is on black and white, you can blow it up quite easily. Then I did the Spanish prisoners of war for evidence of non-intervention, took the film to Geneva and tried to get the League of Nations people to look at it. They wouldn't look at it officially of course but we showed them the cross-examination of prisoners. I hid a microphone when they were being cross-examined and told them that we were filming them to try to prove that they were alive since Hitler and Mussolini had said that all the prisoners were killed. Of course this didn't reassure the poor bastards because they expected that they would be killed as soon as the film was finished. And I remember an ethical question involved there. When I showed them at the ACT, Annie Asquith's sister, Bonham Carter, came along with a woman friend who was very indignant when I explained that they hadn't known that I was recording what they were saying. She said this was dishonest and all that kind of thing. Well quite candidly it never crossed my mind at all because what I was trying to do was to save very many lives by trying to make people realise the political game that was being played by the British and French who knew perfectly well that the Germans had forced their armies to go there. I mean the Italian soldier saying that he'd no idea where he was going when he was put on the ship and that sort of thing, and they called them volunteers! It was quite useful – a German saying that he was assigned there to an airforce unit. You can always say that you should never deceive anybody by hiding the microphone, but I don't know. When you use words like good and bad in a general sense it's very difficult, you have to analyse what you're trying to do.

*Can we talk just a little about the Trade Union? You were involved from the beginning in the establishing of the Union. That was from when?*

I can't remember exactly but the Union would tell you. I'm not the member number one. At that time of recruiting of course the idea was only just beginning and everybody was very snobbish and didn't want to degrade themselves by being associated with the idea of a trade union. They asked a Conservative MP to be President. It was that sort of atmosphere. The first breakthrough we got in recognition was at Shepherd's Bush. It was very interesting because we tried to build the Union there. There were only about half a dozen members, but we were trying to interest other people. Some tried to organise a company union and to sell the idea to Mick. Now Mick is a man of very decent instincts and very fine to work with but he doesn't always see things that are new to him



98 clearly right away. He played with the idea for a bit. There was a great meeting called on the biggest floor. There was to be a discussion of the proposal to form a company union. We arrived there – it was after hours – Mick was going to address us and he didn't turn up and nobody came. The place was packed. The whole staff was there and nobody came. Presently it was suggested that I should take the chair, so I took the chair and I could see waiting in the door one of the characters whom I shall not name who was actually a story writer on some of the pictures I was producing. I called out to him and said: 'Go down stairs and tell Mick that we will give him exactly ten minutes by my watch before this meeting is adjourned. It is disgraceful for us to be called here after hours and nobody with guts to come up and talk to us'. So he disappeared. Mick didn't come up, the meeting was adjourned, it was dispersed and the manager, Boxall, was authorised to recognise the Union. He was the breakthrough, after he recognised the Union all the other studios began to follow suit.

*There was always a strong left influence in the Union. Why is that? It seems to have been much more left inclined than most other unions. Or was it?*

Well, yes. I don't know. To my knowledge the number of Communists was always very few. Even during the war when of course the Communist Party membership was at its height, there were not to my knowledge more than twenty or thirty members in a union of several thousand members. On the executive which consists of twenty or thirty people, there were not to my knowledge more than two or three. But the point is I think that those there were, were assiduous in their attendance. They worked well and by worked I mean they didn't always hold up their hands when the others held up their hands. When Communists do that they become quite insufferable. And reasonably so because people realise that even two or three people who may start with some fundamental ideas don't always agree about everything. They behaved reasonably and like other people and they earned respect. Working hard in any trade union earns respect because when people go to vote, they vote for people they know and have seen. We always had on the executive to my recollection two or three Conservative members, Tory Party members who were respected for their activity. Perhaps two or three Communists, a host of non-party people and perhaps half a dozen enthusiastic Labour people. There was always a Liberal in Anthony (Asquith), and occasionally a Scottish Nationalist. I think we succeeded where Communists do succeed in things and that is when they are they are standing for a solution to the problems that face the trade unions and when they are reasonable. I don't know of any vote in the ACT that's ever been carried by a majority of left wing people, not in all the thirty or forty years

I've been associated with it. The vote was the logical result of the discussion. 99

*The kind of theme I was interested in from that question is that there seems to have been a persistent kind of left interest in the cinema in various kinds of ways. But there has never been a left cinema or a real left interest except as you say in a kind of opportunist way – I don't mean that critically, as a specific thing came up you thought a film would be useful, and a film might be made.*

Of course. Well that has been because of the structure of financial distribution in this country. The monopolies have done that. Where you can't produce minority things and make minority pictures successful, minority political ones have even less opportunity. But you take Japan where there is a big and effective and commercially viable political film production, there they have organised a considerable left wing movement to have their own cinemas and look at their own films. Now in England this has failed again and again. It's been attempted with the Trade Unions which have just once or twice commissioned films of their own. It was attempted in the Round House for theatre and cinema and didn't come off.

I would ascribe it to the fact that the general level of culture makes it very difficult to get anything off the ground that is specialised, like that. Let me give you an example. If you read Trotsky you find Trotsky describing how in the early days of the revolutionary movement in Russia the argument was for the intellectuals to 'go to the people', the narodniks did it, the socialists did it, the communists did it, all kinds of people did it. Well they would go to villages where people couldn't read or write and were remote from radio or television. A person who came in and offered to teach people to read and write got respect. He didn't have to read politics all the time for people to be interested in his ideas. You had a blank sheet for communication with the masses. The moment the masses have got their occupations and their time occupied, listening or paying attention to politics or going to a political film means *not* going to the dog races, not sitting with the television, not going to something else. You have a great deal more difficulty in spreading any political ideas by any political method. You haven't got a blank sheet in modern society. And in the Western countries this is a real problem in developing any political argument at all.

*But was there ever any thought of bringing politics into entertainment? As into the feature cinema? I mean it seems odd, but nobody...*

Where? How could you?

They wouldn't even let us bring Hitch's non-politics in because it was out of the ordinary.

*Ah, now that's really the question I'd like to ask you. Is that really the case that Hitchcock is non-political? Because on the face of it there's at least the sources, I mean John Buchan, Conrad, and so on, very right wing. What I was really trying to argue was that you might in fact find political implications in these films and you might find them to be decidedly right wing implications.*

No, well I say there are implications in any film. You know the point of the marxist critics, marxists say a film with no politics in it is still a political film, it is distracting people from the idea that change is needed in the world. And that is a thing of course on which I have written abundantly. But I never expected to be able to make a film that had 'change' in it. I knew that as soon as people noticed it they would stop it, just as in America when they noticed what *American Tragedy* was about they stopped it. When they asked us to make it, they didn't know what it was about. But it was inescapable by the time we finished our script.<sup>15</sup> Somewhere along the line they would have stopped you. Now I believe you get away with it a bit more because of the fact of this not being regular fare and because of there being such a shortage of films but in those days you had no chance at all so that's the answer why I never expected or thought of being able to make political films commercially.

*When you were working with Eisenstein what kind of things was Eisenstein thinking at that period? There's not much written.*

In that book I wrote of it, *With Eisenstein in Hollywood*.

*Well, you've written about projects you were engaged in.*

Yes. What Eisenstein had was that he was all-absorbent. The unfamiliar culture – everything he wanted to do, everything he wanted to see, ceaseless energy to meet people, to see crowds, to do things, to see everything American people did. He was a man absorbing and adding to the vast store of knowledge and experience of cultures that he had. That was his chief interest. He thought he knew how to make pictures rather better than any of the other people. I don't think he picked up any ideas from other people or expected to in that sense.

*What ideas were you picking up from him? Were you?*

No, I don't think so. You see this approach to cinema was two or threefold. One was didactic and scientific, in the relationships of

various kinds of movements, patterns, compositions and things like that, producing psychological states in people and so forth. You could get that from seeing his pictures and reading his stuff, without needing conversation. His teaching, his direct teaching in lectures and what I learnt from people who were there, and translating and also the short course we had in Russia, there I would say were wonderful examples of the ideas that were already expounded in his writings and pictures. But what was unique, and he couldn't teach you that, was his artist's eye. The expression of his drawing, rendering his theories in composition. Now I've been always aware that that side of me is very deficient. Also, I know nothing about music. I can react to it as a dog can react to it and I've produced musical films, but I can't compose and I can't understand the technique at all. Art I can understand a great deal more, but I know that I am weak in my own composition and visual sense.

*But the kind of theoretical ideas about the cinema which Eisenstein had?*

Those I could get from the books and films.

*No, I was wondering if you felt it made any difference to your own career?*

No. I wouldn't say so because I feel that it is the approach that any scientist makes and that he either reaches similar conclusions himself or he recognises conclusions as one did with Eisenstein that one didn't think of first. But of course, that's how it would work. I think he approached cinema as a scientist. He analysed his own work as a scientist.

*It is very curious just, again returning to Close Up, the kind of response they had to the Russian film. They liked Russian movies a lot. But they seemed to think: that was a great dramatic story, it was very well done, etc. They tended to write about the films in a very impressionistic way.*

Don't miss the kind of people whom *Close Up* included and I wouldn't except myself . . . They approached the revolution as Liberals. So long as it's a struggle against oppression and a struggle for freedom, it's intensely appealing to people in other countries who have been struck by the need for a greater measure of freedom and justice than they find in their own society. The films that were made by the early Soviet cinema, films of the struggle against oppression, of the defeat of oppression, these are the things with which every Liberal could deeply sympathise. And that was what came first, afterwards they would translate that into a certain analysis – why do I like it and how did he get these effects and how

102 does he influence me? But the sympathy came first. Now those are people who often would consider themselves revolutionaries, sympathisers with the Soviet Union and they belonged to what I think Andrew Rothstein rather unkindly called 'the friends of the Soviet Union till' club. Something comes which upsets their liberal consciences. I don't mean that what the Soviet Union does is necessarily always right, it very often isn't. They are human beings trying to decide what is a right or wrong course in given complicated situations. They're not simple, and with the best will in the world even if they were saints they would constantly be doing things that were wrong. But the point is they got disappointed when it doesn't fit an ideal pattern and then begin to find the new films dull. I remember going to the Soviet Union on one of my first visits and seeing a film fourteen reels long about village life the climax of which was when somebody switched on the electric light and it worked. Well now, you couldn't expect that film to appeal to anybody else in any other country where they were accustomed to switch on electric lights. But that was a thrilling subject to millions of people in the Soviet Union.

*I was really getting at something much more general. British film criticism whether in the late twenties or now, seems a very untheorised, not necessarily uncritical, but a kind of unin intellectual way in which the cinema is actually appreciated.*

*Can I add that reading now things written in the twenties by Eisenstein, and Vertov, Pudovkin and the others you can realise that actually, they had quite severe disputes among themselves.*

Oh yes, and I was very interested in that Russian number that *Screen* had with the criticisms of *October* which came out and so on.

*Were people aware of that in England or did they just take all Russian films as being more or less the same and the important thing was that they were Russian?*

Some people must have been aware. But I don't know that anybody in the *Close Up* group could or had any idea of that. But although you describe those things and those violent quarrels I don't know that they really affected the scene so much as you might infer without knowing the background. You see artistic quarrels have always gone on in Russia. Imagine the way now that arguments are always quoted over here and if they were done with that violence people would think that the world was coming to an end here, but it's I think quite an old tradition and it's a literary tradition too, and some of those people are people who would be just rationalising jealousy and that happens in every circle and others are people who are being constructive and friends and they

use exactly the same sort of language. But you are quite right, you raise that point and I think people were not aware of it at all outside. Many people outside did not know that Eisenstein made no successful pictures in the Soviet Union between *Potemkin* and *Alexander Nevsky*. His pictures came here and were acclaimed abroad as a terrific something or other but that was because the only people who could see them were the people who could be interested in, moved by, or excited by the formal aspects. But where they had to appear to a large public for whom many of the experiments and technical things that he was trying to do were quite novel and hadn't reached a familiar language. These didn't go down with the public at all. He would come and lecture about them and I would find these lectures absolutely fascinating and I would realise that the films had enormous value. But I also realised that if you were in circumstances in which you had to work with a public and not only that but with colleagues who might never give you another chance to work you wouldn't be able to have that liberty of experimentation. The twenties in the Soviet Union was the period of the greatest liberty in the arts that had ever been known in the society. That of course is the great mistake and although it is only a historical mistake, not otherwise a mistake perhaps, of *Zhivago*. The point was brought to my attention as a matter of fact by Ehrenburg. In *Zhivago* you must remember, everything is monotonous and everybody is jumping on every kind of experiment in art. And Pasternak, who was a man who lived very much by himself and wasn't familiar with what was going on, was introducing into his novel the situation in the arts that arose about twenty years later; but the time of which he wrote, was the time of all these grandiose experiments, the time that they got Corbusier to come over and design, build buildings and so on and when they had plans to paint Ribero frescoes all over the Chinese wall at the Kremlin and so on, things that were absolutely fantastic and idiotic but a lot of them came to be done and a lot of them were nearly done. That was the time of *Dr Zhivago* and that was the time when these young film people were growing up and getting the chance to make the pictures which we now so much admire. But of course, not only *we* admire. When these pictures are put on television now, I notice that people come to tell you: 'We've seen *Ivan*', 'We've seen *October*', 'We've seen those films that have been put on in these series of retrospectives that have been put on by television', when millions and millions more have seen them than ever saw them in their hey day and they say how interested they were and how they've never forgotten them and so on. But that is because they are now more used to it. In those days, even in Russia, people didn't like the films, except *Potemkin* and the *Nevsky*. And when one looks on Eisenstein's career as some people do as a repression of the arts, this is only possible because we put ourselves in the position of an artist in England who is fascinated by this stuff and

104 always was fascinated by it and can't imagine anybody who jumps on it being anything but somebody who is jumping on art. But if we put ourselves into the situation and realise that the very fact that these people were making these pictures at all is an extraordinary freedom considering that they were never popular with the public, it's a very different complexion then to see his career in those terms. I once wrote a comparison, as a matter of fact, between Eisenstein's career in the cinema and Stroheim's in the capitalist world. Eisenstein had troubles enough with every picture he made in the Soviet Union and so any artist like him would have in any system in the world, Utopian or otherwise because of the enormous resources you need to make pictures on the scale he wanted to make them, and therefore the difficulty of getting enough people to be interested in what you're doing to justify the allocation of those enormous resources. But, when he came out abroad, capitalism didn't give him any better deal in making pictures he wanted to make. And one has to see that in perspective. No, the fights went on in the Soviet Union and they fed on that fact that the artists although very free at that time were also free to quarrel and did . . . Well, I remember Mayakovsky's suicide, how much that was due to personal relations and how much it was due to the quarrels he was having with RAPP, you can't analyse this unless you know the exact circumstances and so forth, but he was having these quarrels with RAPP.<sup>17</sup> The Government and the Party was not on the side of RAPP, but it's humiliating and it's wearing and it's exhausting and upsetting to an artist who may be upset with personal matters as well and those sort of things cause him to do things that normally one wouldn't do. But that illustrates the atmosphere of quarrel I am trying to illustrate. And some people came through it and some didn't. Does that answer the points you were getting at?

*Actually I think it relates to something which we were asking about political cinema because, I mean I suppose nowadays people actually have a concept of a political cinema which is not a thing on occasion. But lots of film makers would think of themselves as political film makers first and foremost. Now that's a situation which as you described it in the thirties, didn't exist. The way you saw yourself for instance, you were in the capitalist industry, or on occasion, a special occasion, you would make a film, for the Party, a particular situation but you didn't see yourself as a political film maker as many film makers do now.*

Can't you make the analogy between a film teacher, a man who is working and being a good schoolmaster and is also a good trade unionist so that he eventually ends up as president of the NUT twenty years later? And probably very respected and that's why he hasn't got thrown out. He's a good schoolteacher and head-

master of his school and there's no thought in his mind of throwing up his job to do a summer school lecture occasionally for the Party.

*No, look, the situation is now that there are people who do see themselves as political film makers in a sense, there are people now who see themselves as political schoolteachers as well, for good or ill. And obviously in that situation one has to pose those debates of the twenties because what strikes me in the differences between Vertov and Eisenstein, is that they saw themselves as political film makers.*

No.

*You don't think they did?*

No, they saw themselves as Soviet film makers and this is what the Soviet people and they themselves were interested in.

*Well, what is a Soviet film maker?*

No, look at it this way. Nearly all those early film directors were middle class, bourgeois intellectuals. Now when the films that were made were films about the revolution and people wanted it, the public wanted that, because it had just happened, they wanted to see it happen and to see themselves and to identify with these events. And it was a question of making *Potemkin*, *October*. Men like Eisenstein could be fascinated by these events and there could be a fairly good marriage of content and form. But when it came to the business of construction, making the electric light work, and making collectivisation, mechanisation of agriculture work so that the age-old labouring of farms was less onerous, how could a man who had never worked on a farm in his life have any sympathy with it? Immediately they all became formalist, because they were only interested in the form and not in the content, they couldn't make themselves into revolutionaries. They couldn't make themselves interested in content they weren't interested in. How far it was conscious and how far it was unconscious is another matter. But that was the kind of thing that began to happen. Then things cleared up and when they began to be established and the Revolution was a past thing they began to want to do things on personal relations. And Pudovkin had to make a picture – I don't think he was *told* to make a picture, but his innards told him to make a picture – like that story of *A Simple Case* instead of the revolutionary pictures, and his methods were not adapted to them. It wasn't somebody making him do a thing but it was what he happened to be keen on. And he wasn't thinking in the other things of *wanting* to make politics, he didn't think of himself as a political



106 film maker, I'm quite certain. It is that the atmosphere was propitious for that kind of picture. Nowadays of course all the second rate people are continually making and have been making, and which has been the curse of Eastern Europe, not only the Soviet Union, pictures of the war. And they are making them because it's the easiest thing. They're not so good at making pictures if they haven't got the ready-made thriller and plot that the moment you've got it you can make something easily that will hold the audience by almost any means. I think the distinction of the political thing is entirely false and belongs simply to that period.

*But I don't see how it could be that Eisenstein's attitude to his work in the Soviet cinema obviously couldn't be comparable to your attitude to your work in British cinema, surely?*

He was trying to make the best pictures he knew how along the ways of the creative experiments that he was interested in and choosing subjects that interested and excited him. But they were *always* those subjects that interested and excited him. He went back to these battles and things. He didn't do the others because they didn't interest him. Not because he didn't think he was good at them, he thought he was good at anything, but because they didn't interest him. He wanted to make things like the struggle of the . . . not in Cuba, the other place, in Haiti, and so on, these battle things. He wanted to do the whole history of Mexico because he always found the visuals in Mexico so exciting.

#### Notes

1. Mr and Mrs Sidney Drew were a husband and wife comedy team; they appeared in a number of films just before and after the first world war. Their films included *Their Mutual Motor* and *The Unmarried Look*, and they were mainly shorts.

'Pimple' was Fred Evans, a top British slapstick star of silent film; when sound came in he lost favour and mostly worked as a film extra. He starred in a number of shorts featuring the character 'Pimple', including *Sexton Pimple*, *Pimple's Battle of Waterloo*, and *Pimple's Ivanhoe*.

2. Montagu first came into contact with Emil Jannings and Elizabeth Bergner when he went to Germany for *The Times* early in 1925. There he saw *Nju* by Paul Czinner starring Jannings and Bergner and Conrad Veidt. He later met most of the actors and the director during his stay, and this was the beginning of his friendship with Elizabeth Bergner. He returned later the same year to negotiate with Paul Czinner and Elizabeth Bergner (these two later married) to show *Nju* at the Film Society.
3. The Stage Society was founded in 1899 for the production of plays of artistic merit but which stood little chance of being performed in a commercial theatre. Such plays were given a West End cast and put on at a West End theatre for one or two performances. Con-

sequently they were necessarily performed on a Sunday when the commercial theatres were closed. The first performance of Shaw's *You Never Can Tell* (this was the first public production of the play) was interrupted by a police raid; Sunday entertainments were at that time still illegal. The Society set a precedent and led the way for other Sunday-playing theatre groups.

The Stage Society produced more than 200 plays, including the first production in England of a number of Shaw plays; the works of foreign dramatists – Hauptmann, Gorky, Gogol, Wedekind, Kaiser, Pirandello, J J Bernard, Afinogenov, Cocteau and Odets, were presented for the first time in Britain by the Society.

The Society continued into the 1930's when a move was made to close it as new theatres had arisen (eg the Gate Theatre) which were putting on full productions of new plays. The Society did continue however until the war when it fell into abeyance.

4. Sidney Bernstein was born in Ilford, the son of a successful quarry owner and builder who had an incidental interest in cinemas. Bernstein began his career in the family business and soon rose to the top. His father died in 1921 leaving five theatres to Bernstein. This became his main business interest and he went on to develop the enormous Granada chain (in 1927 he had ten theatres, in 1936, thirty-six, 1954, fifty-seven). He was not indiscriminate in his exhibition of films, and C A Lejeune described him as being 'selective and responsible'. He was one of the founders of the Film Society and a member of the intellectual and social group centred on the Society. At this time he was involved in his own 'self-education', learning from McKnight-Kauffer, Frank Dobson, Eisenstein, about architecture, the arts and cinema. In 1927 he introduced the first Saturday morning film showings for children.

Bernstein joined the Labour party in 1919 and has been a life-long socialist, always on the left of the party; one of the 'socialist millionaires', he was given a life peerage in 1969.

He developed a very successful cinema-circuit and later became involved in production with Hitchcock on the making of *Rope* and *Under Capricorn*. From 1940-45 Bernstein was Films Adviser to the Ministry of Information; after the war he went on to further develop the Granada chain and in 1955 he entered commercial television with Granada Television Ltd. He is Chairman of Granada Group Ltd, Granada Theatres Ltd, Granada Publications Ltd, Granada TV Rental Ltd and director of Granada Television Ltd (he was Chairman from 1955-70).

5. *Close Up* was the first major magazine of serious film criticism to appear in English; the first number was published in July 1927. *Close Up*, together with the Film Society etc, was an important element in the growing critical movement in the 1920's which saw film as an art medium as well as a commercial product. It ceased to appear in December 1933.
6. George Pearson, a founder member of the Film Society, was the only well-established director at the time who gave any significant support to the Society.

Born in 1875, he had worked from 1895 to 1912 as a school master. In 1912 he started in films, making his first three-reeler. From then until 1947 he worked variously as a director, of features

and documentaries, producer, author, script writer, and studio manager. His silent films were probably his best; in particular, the *Ultus* series of films made in the Feuillade manner around 1916, and the enchanting *Squibs* series, starring Betty Balfour, made in the 1920's. Other films of the twenties include *Reveille* (1924), *Satan's Sister* (1925), *The Little People* (1925), *Blinkeyes* (1926). His first sound films were collaborations made in Hollywood and include *Journey's End* (1930). He worked successfully in the thirties as a free-lance director and his films include *Gentlemen's Agreement* (1935), *Checkmate* (1936), *The Third String* (1930) and *River Wolves* (1934). From 1940 to 1946 Pearson was the Film Director in Chief at the Colonial Film Unit. The Unit made 170 films during the war; among those directed by Pearson are *British Family in Peace and War*, *Take Cover*, *An African in England*. His autobiography *Flashback* was published in 1957.

7. Adrian Brunel had developed from childhood a passion for films and he began his career working for a firm of film exhibitors; he then started his own firm, Mirror Films, with Harry Fowler Mear as a director. He was eventually called up to serve in the army but was medically unfit for active service and found himself in the newly established army film department. After the war he joined the British Actor's Film Company – the first cooperative film production concern in Britain – as scenario director, at the same time forming a film actors agency called Bramlins with Benedict James and John Payne (and which was continued by John Payne until 1941). He then formed British Comedy Films with Leslie Howard, Aubrey Smith, A. A. Milne and Nigel Playfair, which was later Minerva Films. Here Brunel did his first commercial film directing. The company eventually folded; although its films were successful, it lacked the capital to make a sufficiently large film 'package' to sell to the distributors. He then worked on a number of unsuccessful travel films and was out of work for two years. He met Michael Balcon in 1924 together with C. M. Woolf and was signed on with Gainsborough Pictures to direct films for distribution by Woolf, and he made a number of burlesques. He founded the Film Society in 1925 with Ivor Montagu and others, and also an editing company which later became Brunel and Montagu Ltd.

His first sound picture was the very successful *Elstree Calling* (1930); Brunel was taken off the film after the shooting had been completed because of a dispute with a producer about the humour of a scene. The film was finished without Brunel's 'fancy editing' and Hitchcock re-shot the scene in question.

Brunel had become mistrusted by the production companies and distributors who saw him as 'dangerously revolutionary' in his film ideas and his career was seriously affected. In the thirties he found it difficult to get work; he did make a number of short comedies with Fox British and various 'B' pictures, and later worked with Korda at the Denham studios. He joined Balcon again at Ealing, working with Cavalcanti on *Yellow Caesar*. He then became production consultant with Leslie Howard at Denham studios. He died in 1958.

His major films include *The Man Without Desire* (1923), with Ivor Novello; *Lovers in Araby* (1923); *Blighty* (1927); *The Intruder* (1934); his scenarios include *The Return of the Scarlet Pimpernel* (1937) which he also co-directed with Alexander Korda, and *The Lion has Wings* (1939).

His books include *Filmcraft* 1935; *Film Production* (introduction by Alexander Korda) 1936; *Film Script: the technique of writing for the Screen*, 1948; *Nice Work: the story of thirty years in British film production*, 1949. 109

8. The Original Council of the Film Society was composed of: Iris Barry (film critic), Sidney Bernstein (film exhibitor), Frank Dobson (sculptor), Hugh Miller (actor), Ivor Montagu, Walter Mycroft (film critic), Adrian Brunel (film director).

The Founder Members were: Lord Ashfield, Anthony Asquith, George A Atkinson, Clare Atwood, Anthony Butts, Lord David Cecil, Aubrey Clark, George Cooper, Edith Craig, H Fraenkel, Roger Fry, J B S Haldane, Julian Huxley, Professor Jack Isaacs, Augustus John, E McKnight Kauffer, J Maynard Keynes, Angus MacPhail, Olga Miller, H F Rubenstein, Christopher St John, George Bernard Shaw, J St Loe Strachey, Lord Swaythling, Dame Ellen Terry, Ben Webster, H. G. Wells.

Others who joined later were: Sidney Cole, Thorold Dickinson, John Grierson, Robert Herring, Ellen Wilkinson and Basil Wright. Adrian Brunel was forced to resign from the Council very early on due to pressure from his employers (he was under contract to Gainsborough Pictures whose distributor, C M Woolf, was very opposed to the Film Society and forced Brunel's resignation), but the Society continued to use the offices of Brunel & Montagu, and he was very involved in the Society, if not officially.

Walter Mycroft was film critic with the *Evening Standard* at the time – his interest in films developed when a story of his was made into a film. He began as a sub-editor on the *Standard* and became critic after an article by him on 'Films as a new Art Form' was published. With his developing support for the Film Society and 'Art' films he no longer conformed with the *Standard's* ideas about film and with the introduction of the Quota Act Mycroft moved into films in 1927 when he joined British International Pictures as literary adviser. In 1933 he became Director of Productions at BIP (later Associated British Production). He died in 1959.

Iris Barry, born in Birmingham 1895, said that her taste for movies was fixed after seeing an early French production of *Les Misérables* in about 1913. She was a keen film-goer and began writing about film for *The Spectator* around 1923-24. One of the founders of the Film Society in 1925, she later wrote an article on the 'sad state of film production in Britain' which led to a job as film critic for the *Daily Mail* in the same year.

She went to New York in 1930. In 1935, with funds from the Rockefeller Foundation, she began the Film Library of the newly established Museum of Modern Art. This was about the same time that comparable organisations were created in France and Britain for the preservation of films and their appreciation. With the passing of the silent film and the realisation that these would never be seen again there had developed a movement for the setting up of film archives.

She retired as Director of the Department of Films in 1951 but continued active in the International Federation of Film Archives which she had founded in 1935. She died in 1969.

Her books include: *Lets Go to the Pictures* (1925), *Splashing into Society* (1923), *Portrait of Mary Wortley Montagu* (1930), *D W Griffith: An American Film Maker* (1940) and she translated from the French and edited Bardeche and Brasillach's *History of the Motion Picture*.

9. Le Vieux Colombier, le Studio des Ursulines and le Studio 28 were specialist cinemas which emerged to meet the need for places to exhibit art films particularly the films of the avant-garde not generally distributed. They grew out of the film society movement in France in the 1920's which developed from an original but unsuccessful idea by Delluc for a vast cine-club on the scale of the Touring-Club of France. Nevertheless Delluc then went on to organise, with Canudo and Moussinac, special showings of films which brought in audiences with a serious interest in the cinema. This idea led to a proliferation of cine-clubs in Paris and various large towns in France. At the same time specialist cinemas were established, like Vieux Colombier, to show avant-garde films; these cinemas developed regular audiences of followers of serious art films, and were an important distribution system for such films, which had been Delluc's original goal.
10. *Secrets of Nature* was a series of nature films produced by British Instructional in the early 1920's. They were unique studies of wild-life and plantlife, photographed by leading British cinematographers and edited by people who were recognised authorities on the subjects dealt with. *Biograph* (20.9.23) describes the series: 'Special Features: the wonderful close-up of minute creatures; the clever linking together of the scenes into a story of connected interest; the variety of the subject matter; the pictures of incidents never previously photographed'. These films had been widely acclaimed and gained a large reputation. None of the filming was faked and many of the series constituted significant scientific achievements. They were also presented 'to make the broadest popular appeal' and were obviously presented as 'entertainment' as well as instruction.  
Films in the series include: *The Mayfly*, *Battles with Salmon*, *The Stickleback*, *The Story of Westminster Hall* (1923) and *Seed Time and The Golden Eagle* (1925).
11. Graham Cutts had originally trained as an engineer. He started in films in 1909 as an exhibitor and moved into production in 1920. He was the 'Blue-eyed' boy at Gainsborough Pictures and he was very successful with distributors particularly C M Woolf. He was the top British box-office director in the 1920's and made the famous *Rat* films with Ivor Novello. With the coming of sound Cutts was rather eclipsed but made a return with a number of comedies including *Three Men in a Boat* (1933), *Aren't Men Beasts?* and *Over She Goes* (both 1937). He joined World Wide in 1940 and worked with them until 1947 making a number of documentaries and shorts. He died in 1958. Hitchcock's early film work was on Cutts' Films, as scriptwriter, assistant director, editor and designer.

Ivor Novello; singer, composer, film and stage actor and playwright. He was trained as a singer but also wrote, having a great success with 'Keep the Home Fires Burning' which became a marching song in the war and netted him £16,000. After the war he went on the stage and acted in his own play *The Rat* which was later made into a film, the first of three. His first film, *The Man*

*Without Desire* (1923) was the beginning of a very successful film career as the Romantic Hero, in the 1920's. With the change to sound films Novello returned to the stage and appeared and produced a number of musicals, many of which he wrote himself. He also was very successful as a song composer and he established the Ivor Novello Music Publishers. He continued to act in and produce plays and musicals up to his death in 1951.

12. *The Gold Rush*, made in 1925, was written and directed and starred in by Charlie Chaplin and made by the Charles Chaplin Production Co.

*Shadows* was probably *The Shadows*, made in 1918 by Reginald Barker for Goldwyn (USA).

13. Brunel & Montagu Ltd. This began as a small jobbing firm of Brunel's later becoming a partnership with Montagu. He joined when the Film Society was started, because many of the films shown needed to be re-titled and sometimes edited. New employees of the firm were self-recruited; after a period doing odd jobs in the office and being generally useful one was put on the payroll.

The firm was the first of its kind in Wardour Street and it worked entirely on finished films which were wrong in some way, cutting and editing them, and also re-titling foreign films. When the talkies came the firm was killed; production companies didn't think it necessary to edit them and editing became a mechanical 'joining' job and the equipment needed for talkies had become too expensive. Sub-titling foreign films was not economic either—where before companies paid £250 for the re-titling of a foreign silent film, they paid £40 for the sub-titling of a talkie.

Begun by Brunel with Jock Orton and Tod Rich (on the latter two's de-mob pay), it was later joined by Ian Dalrymple (ex-editor of *Granta*, later chief editor at Gaumont British; director, producer and writer), Frank Wells (son of H G Wells; later script-writer and then art director at the Denham Studios), Angus MacPhail (left to become scenario editor of Gainsborough Pictures, later scenario chief at Gaumont British and then at Ealing Studios), Sergei Nolbandov (script-writer, director and producer), Michael Hankinson (supervising editor of British and Dominion Films Corporation, later a director), and Reginald Beck (later editor for Fox Films and other companies; then supervising editor at Denham, and finally co-editor with Laurence Olivier).

14. Charlie Cooper began in films through association with Kino-Films in the 1930's where he was working with other young film makers on documentaries on the hunger marches in Wales and the tenant strikes in East London. He went to the USA in 1940 and spent seven years running the film department of a major labour organisation before setting up a film hire company called Contemporary Films in 1947. This was not a very favourable period in the USA for the kind of venture Cooper wanted, he was harassed in particular over the distribution of a number of Soviet films, including *Alexander Nevsky*, and he eventually sold the company and returned to Britain where he began a new Contemporary Films, specialising in 16 mm film hire, which he still directs.

15. Montagu collaborated on two scripts with Eisenstein while they were in America together:

*Sutter's Gold*: scenario by Eisenstein, G V Alexandrov and Ivor

Montagu, taken from the novel *L'Or* by Blaise Cendrars.

*An American Tragedy*: scenario by Eisenstein, Alexandrov and Montagu, based on the novel by Theodore Dreiser of the same title.

16. *Film Problems of Soviet Russia* by Winifred Bryher, 1929.
17. RAPP or VAPP was the All-Union Association of Proletarian Writers, founded in 1920 by descendants of Proletkult, and produced the journal *On Guard*, dominated by Lelevich, Vardin and Rodon; more moderate leadership appeared after 1925 including Averbakh, Libedinsky, Kisho and Ermilov, and the journal became *On Literary Guard*. Reorganised as RAPP (Russian APP) in 1928, controversy with left groups developed (Litfront, Lef) and it was dissolved to form Union of Soviet Writers in 1932.

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*Vietnam - Stop America's Criminal War*. Communist. 1967.

*With Eisenstein in Hollywood: a chapter of autobiography*. Seven Seas Publishers. Berlin. 1968.

*The Youngest Son*: autobiographical sketches. Lawrence & Wishart. 1970.

Contributed to: Daily Worker, Labour Monthly, Marxist Review, Times, PZS, Weekend Review, New Statesman, Observer, Sunday Graphic.

**Ivor Montagu – Filmography***Director, Feature Films*

- 1928 Bluebottles
- 1929 Daydreams
- 1930 The Tonic

*Director, Documentaries*

- 1934 Wings Over Everest, directed by Geoffrey Barkas and Ivor Montagu. Record of the Houston-Mount Everest Flight
- 1938 Defence of Madrid
- Spanish ABC
- Behind the Spanish Lines
- Testimony of Non-intervention
- Britain Expects
- 1939 Peace and Plenty

*Associate Producer*

- 1934 The Man Who Knew Too Much, director: Hitchcock
- 1935 The Thirty-nine Steps, director: Hitchcock
- 1936 The Secret Agent, director: Hitchcock
- Sabotage, director: Hitchcock
- 1949 Another Shore, director: Charles Crichton (Ealing Studios)

*Screenplay and Co-Director*

- 1948 Man, One Family

*Scriptwriter and Screenplay*

- 1948 Scott of the Antarctic, director: Charles Frend (Ealing Studios)

*Script and Screenplay in Collaboration*

- 1956 The Last Man to Hang, director: Terence Fisher



Stephen Mamber\*

## Part II – Direct Cinema and the Crisis Structure

After *Crisis: Behind a Presidential Commitment and The Chair*, Leacock and Pennebaker left Drew Associates. Time-Life support was terminated after the *Living Camera* series, and by this time substantial aesthetic differences had developed between Drew and the other two film-makers. All those involved have gone on to further work, but the period of the Drew-Leacock association needs to be evaluated independently of their later efforts because of the special set of circumstances that led to the making of these films. These conditions (among them the amount of money at their disposal, the nature of the talent involved, their ideas of drama and suitable subject matter) have not since been duplicated. This group of films is still the most substantial, impressive body of cinema-verite created in America.

It is incorrect, though, to assume that what is characteristic of the Drew films is characteristic of direct cinema. As we have suggested, they had very particular attitudes about suitable subject matter, working methods, and structure. It is these attitudes that will next concern us.

The Drew films are a synthesis of cinema-verite techniques and fictional conceptions of character, action, and structure. This is not just a fancy way of saying that filmed reality is subjected to traditional plot structures. The union is considerably more intense. Essentially, it is a grafting operation performed by maintaining the purity of filming methods and putting them to the service of particular theories of what these films ought to be about and how they should be put together. But this does not provide sufficient description of the process, as each step is affected by those before and after, and the interplay of fictional notions and real situations exists at each stage.

The Drew films are consistent in structure and subject matter. They represent a personal vision in the same manner that fictional directors can make films that are an expression of their view of the world. This section will attempt, as an ancillary objective, to explore that similarity. At the outset I should like to make it clear that I do not consider the subsequent analysis to be an attack on direct cinema for not being 'cinema truth', since, despite the label

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cinema-verite, no one ever makes that claim anyway. We shall not worship on the altar of omniscient objectivity, for direct cinema in its very quest for a closer relationship with the world around us becomes an intensely personal form of communication. It is not the propriety of Drew's assertion of choice that will be considered, but rather the nature of that choice and its limitations.

A phrase that has been in constant use during our previous discussion of the Drew films is 'crisis structure'. We have noted many examples of stories whose forward propulsion was provided by an anticipated crisis moment. The basic organising principle behind a Drew film can usually be stated in the form of a success-or-failure question. Will John Kennedy win the election, or will Hubert Humphrey? Will Eddie Sachs win the race? Will Paul Crump be saved from the electric chair? Will the Kennedy's integration strategy work? This description of plot may sound overly simplified in that the same device can often be applied in explaining the structure of fiction films, plays, and novels, at the expense of ludicrously distorting the complex concerns of the work. (Why did Kane say 'rosebud'? Will Hamlet avenge his father's death? Will Ahab find and destroy Moby Dick?) But the point is that this is a traditional fictional structure and not an inevitable conclusion of direct cinema methods and intent. There is no eternal verity in human existence that forces one to structure films in this manner. As in fiction, the Drew films take advantage of devices which provide a skeleton to build upon. Were it otherwise, each film would have a particular form that is wholly unique.

Since this section emphasises so strongly the specific choices made in choosing subjects and editing, it is necessary to restate that the crux of the films, the reason they are worthy of serious study, is their extraordinary faithfulness to key direct cinema concepts, namely, trying to record real people in undirected situations with live sound. By examining the choice of subjects and the editing methods and subjecting them to at times harsh criticism, I in no way wish to denigrate their brilliant ability to enter a world scarcely accessible to film prior to their work. But it is because the technique is so potentially powerful that we need to examine these other areas. Every film-maker, direct cinema or otherwise, must make such decisions. These are one set of possibilities.

### *The Crisis Moment – its origins and justifications*

The initial basis for the form of the Drew films actually predates the development of their filming techniques, a fact that is difficult to reconcile with the view that their fictional tendencies were something of a compromised afterthought. For Drew, the films became an extension of his earlier background:

I worked at *Life* for a number of years, practising a form of photojournalism which required you to be constantly present

116 with your photographic subject *in order to capture the exact place and time when the climax occurs*. I came to conceive of the idea of a movie journalism done in this way with simultaneous sound (my italics).<sup>1</sup>

*Key Picture*, the title of his early pilot film for television, suggests the attempt at extending the photo techniques.

This was a natural, and inevitable, idea. The *Life* picture essays tried to tell a continuous story that had a dramatic impact; why not take advantage of film for the same purpose? The concept is mass-oriented certainly, designed to package reality in an attractive form. But the best photo-articles were always aware of their limitations. They were the pictorial counterpart of the journalistic human story, though they were often accompanied by lengthy stories.

Likewise with the films, from the very beginning there were no illusions as to goals. Those who speak of the drama in the Drew films with an accusatory tone often imply that he wasn't aware of what he was doing. The structure, whatever, other qualities it might possess, was anything but accidental. Given Drew's objective (as expressed in the quote above), one should at least note his consistency in realising it. We are confronted with a forthright, determined approach, and muddled execution of their basic philosophy is a rare occurrence.

Drew, like the *Life* photo essayists, saw the crisis moment both as the ultimate goal of shooting and the conclusion of the story. One kept filming until the crisis moment came, and then the story had an ending. This was a pragmatic structure, then, because the sequence of events in the finished film could correspond to the chronology of filming. The film-maker would be 'recreating reality' by acting as a witness and then not juggling events out of sequence or deliberately falsifying the record of his experience. And obviously, this structure can conform to traditional dramatic (and storytelling) methods. It is a familiar form that maintains audience interest and responds to deeply felt human needs for story resolution and unity.

The requirements of a crisis moment appears to do no more than specify a period in which to film, providing in return a workable structure. An event is picked up at some arbitrary 'in progress' point (narration filling in earlier details if necessary), and from there to the crisis there are seemingly no restrictions. We can carry the positive aspects further, for although a story comes about through the crisis structure, it is ostensibly a means to an end:

The story for me has to go someplace, something has to happen. At the start, I've got a good idea of the things that can happen, but that's not the determining thing because whatever happens, I'll have a story. What really happens in any of these stories is that something is revealed about the people.<sup>2</sup>

The crisis structure, then, was seen as a way to study people (a

concept of drama that is Aristotelian in origin), through a method that attempts to subsume both reporting and storytelling. At worst, the story would be a fictional element to support a non-fictional result. At best, the story would be a true representation of an exciting period, a key time in someone's life. A final quote from Drew, in an interview recorded shortly after *Yanki, Nol* but well before most of the products of the Drew-Leacock period, still sums up the goal:

What makes us different from other reporting, and from other documentary film-making, is that in each of these stories there is a time when a man comes against moments of tension, and pressure, and revelation, and decision. It's these moments that interest us most. Where we differ from TV and press is that we're predicated on being there when things are happening to people that count.<sup>3</sup>

So, the objective has been extended: get that crisis moment, but only so that we can see how people react in such situations.

### *The Crisis Moment in Practice*

It is fine to say that one should strive to capture crisis moments, but what does this mean in terms of film-making? Presumably, one could follow anybody and eventually a crisis situation will develop. There are obvious drawbacks to this procedure, not the least being that it might take years for this to happen. But more interestingly, how could the film-maker be able to anticipate which events are dramatically relevant as preparation for the crisis? For example, if a love affair turns out to be the drama you are after, would you have known to film the earlier stages of the relationship? Short of filming every waking moment for months on end, such a loose method might not even result in a dramatically interesting film. Clearly, this method is too diffuse and haphazard when one wants to build around a crisis moment.

What happens, then, is quite logical. Situations are selected where a crisis is inevitable, even if the precise outcome cannot be foreseen. As Drew said, 'Whatever happens, I'll have a story'. In other words, 'crisis moment' could more practically be referred to as 'different possible outcomes in a situation certain to be resolved'. One has only to recall the Drew film that most clearly failed to meet this requirement. In *Nehru*, there was no inevitable crisis. A true crisis situation conceivably could have developed, but they lost their bet. They still came up with a crisis moment – they manufactured it. Beyond the question of honesty, this was an unsatisfactory solution because it was transparent, and hence dramatically unsatisfying. For a Drew film, that is disastrous.

The Drew films are even more specific in situation than a general crisis orientation might indicate. They belong primarily to one

118 category of inevitable crisis events: *the contest*. A bullfight, a primary election, an auto race, a musical competition: these are all contests. Several of the other subjects, a Broadway opening, a jet plane test, initial enforcement of a law, come very close to contest situations as well. These are all events where a person tries to win a set objective, so the result is decisive in one way or another (win or lose), but always certain to occur.

Contests are crises from start to finish. There is no problem of waiting for a crisis moment to occur; it has already begun. There may be points of greater intensity, but even the slowest moments are still part of a general crisis situation. The end of the contest can be a pronounced crisis moment also, but it may not be the only one nor the most interesting. In *Crisis: Behind a Presidential Commitment* or *The Children Were Watching*, the outcome never seems so important (whether the schools are integrated) as the activities leading up to it. The supposed crisis moment is almost anti-climatic because of the intensity of what precedes it.

This method seems to me to beg entirely the question of the impact of the crisis moment. Even when part of the film covers a period preceding the actual contest (*On the Pole, Football*), there is no difference in intensity. What we have come to, then, from 'crisis moment' to 'different possible outcomes in a situation certain to be resolved' is now simply 'pressure situation'. When the whole film becomes a crisis moment, the conclusion of the film is no more than the outcome of the crisis rather than the anticipated time of character revelation. Part of the attractiveness of the crisis idea as originally conceived should be the assumption that what comes before is *not* a crisis, that some dramatic change takes place that will enable us to get a fresh look at the people involved. Revelations in crisis, combined with opportunities to observe activities at other times, can provide a multi-faceted view of the subject.

*On the Road to Button Bay* does give a suggestion of non-crisis life, and it is present here because the girls are irrepressibly themselves in any situation. But that film is a special case anyway, one of the few which do not try to generate interest through conflict. (*Blackie* is another exception, although he is filmed during a special time in his life.) But even in *Button Bay* one feels a crisis mentality at work, as a portion of the film covers the problems of one of the girls assuming the responsibility of leadership, leading to a scene where she cries over her difficulties. Almost always, the Drew films are a series of crisis moments of relative intensity, sufficiently distributed so that one never sees an extended segment without pressure. It is not quite correct, then, to compare the Drew structure to 'traditional' or 'classical' dramatic form, for beyond their shared propensity towards crisis resolutions, the means of development are scarcely similar.

Another way of obtaining a crisis moment is, of course, to cause it yourself. Very much to Drew's credit, he was rarely guilty of

direct tampering with events. The distinction between perhaps artificially creating a crisis situation in editing (as in *Nehru*) and physically precipitating one at the time of filming may seem like hair-splitting, but there is an important difference. The latter is the first step (and practically the last) towards destruction on the whole direct cinema aesthetic (and ethic), the former only a means of potentially transforming it. Drew could honestly say, in reference to the dramatic element, that 'We don't introduce this element, we discover it'.<sup>4</sup> To him, the crisis moment was to be found, so that rather than creating an imagined reality, he chose those aspects of reality which interested him. The method is assailable only for its limitations and when it isn't honestly 'found' (as by editing), and not as a direct subversion of truth through deliberate tampering with the subject. ('Discovering', though, is hardly the process employed in the Drew films for locating drama; something like 'colliding' seems a more appropriate description.) It is much better for the films to limit possibilities and be successful on those terms than if they had endeavoured to extend the possibilities through taking an active role in preparing material to be filmed.

The pressure situation method is also supposed to be desirable (besides its dramatic reasons) because people will be less aware of the presence of the camera. In the tension of perpetual crisis, the influence of the camera is theoretically not so important as whatever else is going on. This is a point well taken, even though it simplifies the problem of camera influence. The curious thing in this argument is that, in effect, it says by choosing an unnatural situation in which to film, you minimise the chance of unnatural influence. If the sole interest were some sort of unhampered truth, a more likely approach would be to find the situations which seem in themselves to contain a truth that interests you and then seek to minimise your influence by any means possible. The argument concerning camera influence in crisis situations is justification after the fact. It appears to say that the camera does not distort the event any more than the situation itself does, ie is the truth about an unusual event.

Another outcome of using the contest is the likelihood that the film will cover events that last no more than a few days. The period before a crisis moment can naturally be expected to be a time of intense activity, and the films often start here. *On the Pole* was shot in four days, the day of the race and the three before it.<sup>5</sup> *Susan Starr* took the same length of time, *The Chair* a day longer, and *Crisis* a bit longer still (according to the narration in each). Interestingly, if there is any quantitative difference between shooting methods on the films, the increase is in the number of crews filming rather than the length of time any one person is covered. In other words, there is a stronger tendency to increase simultaneous coverage over a brief span than there is to follow a single event through a longer period of time. The result: instead of a traditional

120 sort of character development (or even depending upon character change for its dramatic value), the films take advantage of the opportunity to provide a view of reality not available to any participant.

In this regard, the contest is well suited to direct cinema methods. Films shot over long periods of time that try to tell the continuous story of a few people without extensive narration are incredibly difficult. The Maysles Brothers' *Salesman* is the only one I know coming close to success, and even there a major problem is apparent: the difficulty in making believable, effective transitions. The multi-viewed moment is much easier to edit; you simply cut from one place to another at parallel moments. And continuity is also easier in a short period of time, since there is a greater likelihood of events containing their own logic. For instance, a cut from Paul Crump on Death Row to his lawyer in his office is more acceptable when it takes place shortly before the scheduled execution; we immediately make the logical connection between the two events (that while Crump is waiting, his lawyer is trying to save him). Were it months earlier, however, we would have to be told the reason for going from one place to another because the pressure of time would not then provide an 'automatic' link.

The brief duration of a contest and its generally self-contained nature (little travelling around, fewer peripheral activities) has another important advantage over the film covering a longer period. When shooting lasts many weeks or months, the natural tendency is to select the best moments, to condense a greater mass of material. This is not direct cinema's forte, condensation being more a fictional device. Direct cinema excels in whole chunks of life, long takes full of an infinite number of possibilities. A moment, like Paul Crump's lawyer crying, is nothing without the context of the rest of the scene. Events of short duration are more likely to allow space for these fuller scenes to play themselves out.

One has only to look at the cases when shooting lasted a long time to understand the difference. In *Petey and Johnny* (shot over a six-month period) the resulting material had a formlessness not conducive to a crisis structure and more events occurred than could be effectively handled within the limited time period of a one-hour film. The result was dually unsatisfactory – the episodes were chopped up and a form was created to build to a crisis. The story could only be told, and the different episodes joined together, by a great deal of narration.

Theoretically at least, the short filming period should serve cinema-verite by also tending to prevent the film-maker from growing attached to his subject in such a way that his conception of the material becomes unduly biased. Unlike Flaherty's idea of non-preconception, which came to mean finding the story in the course of shooting even if it meant starting all over once you hit on the essential elements, the direct cinema approach is closer to the

actual meaning of the word. These film crews were practically thrown into unfamiliar situations, with little prior planning or preparation. The spontaneity of this approach should serve to make each assignment result in entirely different kinds of films, but the particular similarities of subjects and situations we are in the act of explaining tended to lessen this possibility.

There is yet a further reason for short time periods in a crisis structure – longer ones provide no added information while they decrease the sense of drama. In *The Chair*, for instance, there would have been no reason to begin the film at an earlier point. The drama was in the proximity to the final moment of decision and, in fact, one might wish for still more information as to what occurred during that brief period. *Eddie*, compared to the earlier *On the Pole*, demonstrates the same point. Repeating the race a second time accomplished no more than repetition of action without added character revelation or increased dramatic excitement. Since the situations were essentially identical, one learned no more about Eddie from the second race than we did from the first.

The contest situations also led to another device that made editing much simpler. The films could be the stories of several people who were rarely, if ever, seen together. *Primary*, *Football*, *Susan Starr*, *Crisis*, and others, all show this trait. Again, it was a useful way to get around the difficult single person continuity problems. (Reportedly, it was Leacock who first recognised the practical advantage of this method.<sup>6</sup>) Like the simultaneous moment cutting mentioned earlier, when a part of one person's story was missing, not interesting, poorly shot or recorded, then you simply cut to the other story. Transitions were easy: they were usually done on parallel actions. From Kennedy making a speech, the cut is to Humphrey doing the same thing. From Susan Starr practising the piano, cut to one of her opponents engaged in similar activity. The first story can then be picked up at a later point. (Parallel editing, of course, has been a cinematic tool since Griffith.) Two stories are advanced that would be much more difficult to develop independently.

A curious result of this intercutting technique is that it is not as forceful a device as one would expect. It would seem to be the perfect way to emphasise conflict, to contrast personalities. In *Primary* and some other cases it occasionally does just that. But more often, it seems, the cutting points up similarities. When a cut is made on the basis of action (from one person doing something to another engaged in a related pursuit), the activity tends to dominate personality differences. Thus, in *Crisis*, when a sequence goes back and forth between Robert Kennedy and George Wallace, it does not emphasise differences between their personalities (or politics) as much as it suggests that they both do a lot of the same things. It is almost a neutral cutting device, good or bad depending upon the affinities of the material on each side of the cut



122 and the sense of honest editing behind them. For instance, in *Jane*, the intercutting between Jane and Walter Kerr after the play doesn't work because the Kerr segments begin so late in the film and weaken the story tension already established. There are many cases of the same thing in *Petey and Johnny*, people popping-in and out more or less arbitrarily. But when there is already an established connection between the intercut sequences and there is no doubt of these actually being simultaneous events, then the device can be tremendously effective. The cut from one locker room pep talk to the other in *Football*, the RFK-Katzenbach phone conversation in *Crisis*, and a precious few others are all we have to begin to get an idea of the power of this technique. Many times, this kind of cutting is simply a bland editing device. For real effectiveness, both elements have to be present: clear connection and certain honesty of cutting.

The main problem with the structure of intercutting stories, then, is that it can be used at cross-currents to what finally seeps through. The cutting appears to set up oppositions, to exploit conflict for dramatic purposes. But when the images belie the attempt, when the conflict seems far less rigid than the ordering of the images would have you believe, the images themselves become suspect. This same idea can be expressed several ways, by emphasising different steps in the process, but these different explanations are all ways of saying the same thing, that the structure does not always support the view that one can abstract on the basis of the bits of filtered reality that the images represent.

In criticism of the films, this idea has often been expressed by saying that the editing looks 'forced'. Patricia Jaffe, herself an editor, reflects this feeling in her observation that 'Many of the Drew films were flawed by pushing the material into a mold where none existed' and attributing this characteristic to a 'result of Drew's inclination and experience', his push to keep the audience at a constantly high level of excitement.<sup>7</sup> What she is saying is that the editing wishes to tell a story not present in the material itself. Her conclusion (very close to Breitrose's and others) is that the best Drew films are those where the conflict and resolution are already present, as in the self-contained situations of *On the Pole* and *Football*. In other words, given an editing method that seeks to establish crisis, the best films are those where the crisis is already present. This, of course, borders on tautology, and doesn't really tell us much about the films.

Louis Marcorelles, with his customary perspicacity, is quite aware of the editing problem in the Drew films, saying that, for him, 'the failure of most of these passionate attempts comes from the absence of controlling unity in the editing'.<sup>8</sup> He explains the problem as a clash between the styles of the individual film-makers when their separate parts are combined into one film. Except for *The Chair*, though, it is difficult to support this argument. What he

really wants to say, I think, is that he wished Leacock and Pennebaker would have had a larger role in editing, feeling they were less crisis orientated than Drew. He does not, then, come to terms with the crisis structure and its editing problems, but only suggests that the films would have been better if they were not 'what they indeed are' — films about crises. So, though he senses that something is wrong, he does not provide a satisfactory answer for what it is.

What the editing discussions all lead to, in the final result, is this: the simple recognition that editing can be as much a form of 'fictionalisation' as scripting or acting. It is often harder to spot, possibly insidious, and sometimes scarcely credible. Because the integrity of the filming situation is respected (in that no one is directed, no scenes are prepared), the opportunity to play off this aspect, to suggest by implication that the film must still be showing 'what happened' no matter how it has been edited, is an easy temptation. Opening narration in the films often play up the technique, emphasising that it is a 'true story' (said at the start of *On the Pole*), that it 'actually happened' (*David*), that 'it wasn't planned, it's for real' (*Petey and Johnny*), and without 'any acting' (*Button Bay*). It is, in fact, the sanctimonious repetition of the claim to undiluted reality that wears thinnest in the narration and comes closest to undermining the whole approach. Constantly exploiting the filming method by directly paying homage to it, the narration seeks to legitimise the editing structure as an invisible joining together of truths.

To Drew's credit, aside from the narration problems, I don't think he hides the role of editing. In fact, he recognises its key formative role in the films. The operative phrase, however, rather than 'editing' is 'cutting on picture logic'. This is no euphemistic cover-up, but an expression of how Drew sees his role: 'I'm interested in one approach only, and that is to convey the excitement and drama and feeling of real life as it happens through film'.<sup>9</sup> The idea behind picture logic, basically, is that if a documentary can be understood by hearing it alone without seeing the pictures, then it is a conventional film cut on 'word logic'. But, on the other hand, if (as Drew once put it) one 'turns off the sound and can follow the logic — *even the drama* — of the show in what evolves visually, then we are confronted, perhaps, with a reality that is captured as it happened (my italics)'.<sup>10</sup> Drew's 'perhaps' is a fortunate though hesitant addition, for it recognises that picture logic may mean other things.

I see picture logic as an attempt to justify visual storytelling as truth. The degree to which a story can be followed visually is no measure of its veracity. In fact, the ease of a visually flowing story might actually indicate that the rough edges of reality have been hewn for the sake of drama. The very smoothness in the tight suspense of *The Chair* is exactly where it may be faulted. Reality

124 does not always coincide with drama, and when it does we had better look twice.

The picture logic idea also ignores the deep, basic difference between narration and live, synchronised sound. As much as we can despise excessive narration (an easy target), to ignore the spoken word is to forget perhaps the single most crucial difference between direct cinema and other forms of film-making, that we are able to hear people saying things that no one has told them to say. There is nothing at all wrong in the 'logic' of a film evolving (which must mean the way it is edited) through what the people in it say: no betrayal of the direct cinema ideal is involved. In fact, it is just as incorrect to assert the supremacy of the visual over the aural as vice versa. Separating the two aspects, thinking in mutually exclusive terms of picture logic or word logic, are only two ways to justify artificial structures.

When credibility is questioned as a result of editing, the house of cards is ready to topple. When reality is fashioned to fiction (reality here a relative term, in the sense of the raw material captured on film), then the shooting process itself is equally open to question. One simply no longer knows where falsity begins, once it is clear that it has affected the ends. Andrew Sarris describes a showing of *Jane* and *The Chair* in Montreal where National Film Board people were sceptical about some of the crudities of the film, and he attributes these (presumably occasional sound difficulties or wandering zoom shots) to 'an attempt to con an audience into thinking that something is more real when it is awkward, or rather awkwardness is truth'.<sup>11</sup> While cinema-verite is always open to this kind of accusation (in fact, Sarris marshals it in attack against *Don't Look Back*, a Pennbaker film not from this period), I think the atmosphere in which it may have some validity is when other sorts of obvious trickery are present, as in the possibly false conflicts of intercutting stories.

A tendency that ought to be studiously avoided as a laboured fictional affectation is the attempt to impart symbolic meaning to concrete events by deliberately separating and labelling them. One such case has already been mentioned, in *The Children Were Watching* when the title is expressly visualised as a 'lesson' in order to lecture the audience about the passing down of prejudice. Another example in an otherwise admirable film, *Blackie*, suggests a crude attempt at conflict which is in no way keeping with the rest of the film. At the beginning, two clips from later points in the film are shown, one in which 'Arrividerci Roma' is sung (seen later during a party for Blackie in Rome during his last flight) and then another scene with 'Happy Birthday' (from a closing scene at his home upon retirement). At these two songs, the narrator says, 'In the next two days he will hear both these songs, and the meaning will change his life'. Verbally creating symbols is an area of abstraction where the direct cinema film-maker should tread carefully (if at

all) if he depends upon having his audience believe that he has attempted to record an event faithfully. If he still insists upon possible symbolism as a necessary element to understanding an event, then it ought not be exploited for dramatic purposes (as occurs in both these examples). The crisis structure is so potentially full of false steps, this is one avenue that ought to be closed off entirely.

### *The Drew Hero*

We have already mentioned Drew's feeling that the structure of these films was simply a method of insuring a complete story, that its real purpose was to assist in studying people. If that were true, we might then be able to excuse certain limitations and rigidity of structure in exchange for substantial variation in the personalities involved and extensive insight into their nature. But, like the general situations, the people involved vary only within a certain sphere. As we shall see, this is no accident. Character and structure are closely bound. We have observed several cases where observation of people may have been distorted by dramatic expectations of what they should be like. Exactly which came first (the subject-types or the structure) is difficult to determine, but their symbiotic relationship is clear.

The ideal Drew subject is an active, positive hero, for this is the person who will act assertively in a crisis situation. In such moments, the precise action is not so important as the need for there to be *any* action. An indifferent hero would be unthinkable in a Drew film. Of course, the hero concept is a fictional one, easily supported by the dramatic expectations of the crisis structure. In *On the Pole*, for example, the camera *had* to stay with Eddie so long that he resented its presence, so we could then feel his reaction as a crisis moment. Without that moment, *On the Pole* lacks resolution. One does not show the events leading up to a crisis without having a character who will follow through in some way.

Several of the Drew films show their heroes in weak moments (an exhausted Kennedy, the crying lawyer, Eddie after the race), but only to reinforce their final resilience in crisis situations. I find that final upbeat more than a bit clichéd and not always convincing, too much a 'pick yourself up, dust yourself off' type of philosophising that ties things up rather neatly.

As Jean-Claude Bringuier points out in a very fine article about the Drew films, whatever the outcome of the ordeal in one of these films, it is positive. If Kennedy lost the primary election, he would say what Humphrey does, and what Eddie Sachs does, that he will start all over again. Bringuier goes on to note how, in effect, these heroes are perpetuations of American myths. 'America exists in *Only Angels Have Wings* as well as in Leacock's films, and it is the same America'.<sup>12</sup>

His reference to a Hawks film is particularly astute, for the image of the hero in a good number of the Drew films is indeed quite Hawksian. A male professionalism often dominates: pilots and race car drivers risking death (both have been subjects for Hawks films), Robert Kennedy and his deputy Katzenbach out to subdue George Wallace, fighting lawyers working hard to save their client against great odds. Success in a Drew film (as in a Hawks film) is measured by the way you handle yourself in a tough situation, how well you do your job when the chips are down. And if you don't quite make it, like Eddie Sachs, well then next time you'll just have to do that much better.

As in Hawks, while the popular images may contain some insight into the American character, the mythic aspects can limit the possibilities for reality. The insights may be less mythic than simply reinforcements of American clichés. Even the more exposed moments can add to the deception, for which of the Drew heroes is exposed in an unexpected manner? Their personalities are molded by their professions, but the professions enforce stereotypes that the films exploit. We come to a film about a race car driver with the expectation that his one goal is to win. When we see him lose, we can only read his reaction as disappointment. In a story about a lawyer working to save a condemned man we assume nothing less than all-out dedication to the job. But what happens, in the first case, if Eddie Sachs is really just glad to get out of the race alive, if he wasn't concerned simply about winning? And what happens if the lawyer is more interested in making a name for himself than winning his case, and if he isn't as prepared as he should be to go to court? I am not saying that these are truer interpretations of the events in *On the Pole* and *The Chair*, but I think it is a serious deficiency of the films that they do not allow room for any interpretations beyond the ones enforced by the hero image. The crisis moment is falsified when the hero is untarnished no matter what happens.

This is where I think the two films in which Pennebaker asserts his camera style, *David* and *Jane*, are more interesting as human documents than many of the other Drew films. The best Drew films were shot during highly charged situations involving many people (a football game, an integration crisis), times when personality seems less important than the drama of the moment. Kennedy may fit the hero image, but the real interest in *Crisis* is the excitement of participating in the event, which is bigger than the personalities involved. In *Football*, the incredible intensity of feeling is expressed by everyone, not just the two coaches. *David* and *Jane*, in contrast, leave their characters vulnerable to the extent that even if David stays away from drugs or Jane's play had been a success, we have observed them at a time when they were at the edge of control. Though the presence of the camera is more clearly a factor in these two films, the complexities of the characters are more fully brought

out simply by nature of the situations, which were less active. 127

The tendencies toward stereotypes are not, I feel, deliberate misrepresentations. Drew, like Hawks, is personally sympathetic to the hero conception, and its presence in the films is more a function of the extent he asserted his personal predilections than a measure of preconceived falsity. Of the two kinds of expected objections to these heroes, only one has merit. I do not think Drew should be castigated for the type of hero his films have (or for dealing with heroes at all) any more than Hawks should, although together they are, of course, equally susceptible to the accusation. The point is crucial, for there is no reason to assume that Drew was bound to come any closer to truth than Hawks solely on the basis of the shooting techniques. We can wish that he would have sensed the potential for direct cinema to surpass fictional techniques, but that he did not desire to do so in no way minimises his actual accomplishments. The same mentality that would ask Drew to be different from what he is would have to ask why no Hollywood director in the Thirties used sound as Welles did in *Citizen Kane*, or why no one before Griffith made a film comparable to *Birth of a Nation*. Once potentials have begun to be realised (and in direct cinema this has scarcely started), it becomes quite easy to fault the true pioneers and innovators for not going further than they did.

For Drew, I think the use of heroes was a reflection of his personal interests. He hoped to pull television documentary out of its doldrums through drama, and the need for personable subjects if this is to be the goal is clear. In discussing with Drew the kinds of people he prefers to make films about, he freely admitted to me that he had certain 'peculiarities and prejudices' on this subject, and went on to say 'I hate to see films about people who are mentally ill or are being detained in prisons: *people who aren't free, people who aren't on their own* . . . I avoid assignments like that like the plague' (my italics). That is certainly a point to notice in his films: the people involved willingly submit to the pressure situations. They aspire to heroic stature, if not always attaining it.

### *Character and Crisis*

The Drew hero and the structure he finds (or imposes, if you wish) reinforce each other. In fact, they are almost two ways to discuss the same idea. Recall what Drew said: 'In each of the stories there is a time when a man comes against moments of tension, and pressure, and revelation, and decision. It's these moments that interest us most'. Expressed in this manner, the two ideas are one; they define each other. The crisis moment is the time when a person responds to this kind of situation, and the type of confrontation is archetypally heroic. The next question, though, is whether the crisis structure requires this kind of main personality.

128 In its broadest sense the answer is no, since there are certainly dramas that are wholly dependent upon a crisis-like structure but which have scarcely sympathetic, much less heroic, main characters. But if the goal of the crisis moment is seen as an attempt to evoke audience interest, then the kind of person it best portrays is easy to see. (Again, this is not a defence of the crisis moment, but rather an explanation of the consequences once it is assumed that such a structure is necessary.) Recalling several of the early Drew films, the supposed crisis moments were rather boring because there was no close identification possible with the participants: Now certainly bullfighters (in *Bullfight at Malaga*) and jet pilots (in *X-Pilot*) are within the idea of a hero, but these particular ones come across as too distant, too cold. I think the difference, the 'warmth', is found in the later films by their taking advantage of the intimate possibilities of direct cinema techniques. We can care about heroes when they have recognisable human quirks, like Eddie Sachs' little prayer before his race or seeing Bobby Kennedy's daughter run through his office. The luxury of intimacy (including the moments of supposed weakness mentioned earlier) are the basis for our interest in the outcomes of the crises.

For Drew, this identification has always been necessary, and for that matter, still is. In talking with him while he was editing a feature length film about gliders, he was particularly insistent upon the need for the audience to see events in the film through their effect upon a person they have seen. His phrase for footage where this identification is absent is 'unattached seeing', material which, however spectacular, lacks a human connection:

When that airplane flies into a storm, I have to know that the central character is in the plane, that he's looking through the canopy, that he's making decisions. Unattached seeing is a term that for me reflects a psychological fact, which is that a physical film is boring, while a psychological film isn't.<sup>13</sup>

The crisis moment alone is not, in fact, a crisis moment at all, without the audience understanding its effect upon a person and feeling that the person is reacting in some way to it.

I think we have seen in some detail how the structure grows out of the idea of the crisis moment, how that concept also relates to the type of subjects chosen, and how the editing tends to support these interrelated concepts. Having attempted to substantiate my claim for the intense synthesis of direct cinema and certain fictional conventions as a result of the crisis structure, we can now go on to discuss some of its major limitations.

### *Crisis and Truth*

The primary justification for the crisis structure is that it provides a vehicle to discover a kind of truth about people. We shall use

that goal as the basic standard in reaching some conclusions about that structure. Is the crisis situation literally the 'moment of truth'? By observing people in pressure situations, Drew means to put them to the test. There is an intense, unspoken faith in the revelation of character under stress. But using the films as evidence, what do we learn about people in crisis?

The 'truths', I maintain, are often empty or misleading. The basic error stems from the unfounded assumption that external appearances and actions are sufficient to interpret inward thoughts. The connection is tenuous at best, and often wholly non-existent. Motivation is still a matter of complete speculation. We never know why people do what we see them doing, and we have nowhere to turn for motivation but to conventional dramatic expectations.

A key test is the scene in *The Chair* when lawyer Don Moore cries. For me, it is the most dramatic moment in all the Drew-Leacock films, and hence should be even more revealing than other less intense crisis moments. But what good, after all, is Moore to Crump unless he *acts*? We simply assume that Moore cries out of unselfish devotion to his cause, since we have come to that view of defence lawyers from fictional sources and from a simple human desire that this be his primary motivation. Without more information (perhaps of the sort Leacock says was cut out), we have nothing to go by.

A similar case is the coach's tic in the closing moments of the game in *Football*. Yes, he's still tense even though his team has just won, but what are we to make of it? It didn't have to happen, but it is hardly an action of any depth, as exciting as it is to see it captured on film. It could never have been acted so convincingly, but that may only prove that it takes real people to perform truly superficial displays of emotion. I don't object to the tic (and in fact, it is a brilliantly executed shot), I only doubt whether it tells us anything we don't already know.

The strongest case of a crisis moment revealing character is, I think, the scene with John Kennedy on election night in *Primary* (discounting instances of certain influence). The reason it is effective points up failures in the crisis situations of many of the films. Most importantly, there is a contrast between the Kennedy we see through most of *Primary* and the one in this scene. He is without the flashy smile, looks considerably more fatigued, speaks more openly, and appears quite different from the familiar public Kennedy we were used to. There isn't a single other case of that kind of character change in the rest of the films, and crisis situations should be nothing else if not times of considerable flux.

Quite honestly, I have never been quite sure exactly what kind of truth the Drew people had hoped to discover through the crisis situations. I expect that dramatic excitement was higher on the list of priorities, that deep down they (or at least Drew) felt there would be no mass audience interest in less intense situations, and



130 that truth would take care of itself because of the shooting methods. Their best films are those which do not aspire to any (or much) character depth (again, ignoring the camera influence situations), like *Crisis* and *Football*, excelling instead on a sort of super-journalistic level where milieu, a good deal of exciting activity, and possible sociological implications are uppermost. But since the films definitely are personality oriented, this leaves us many cases of lots of footage about people we never come to know. I would even go so far as to say that crisis moments are probably much more deceptive situations if knowing people is a fundamental goal. The truths are too simple, too easily obtained, often highly suspect, and too consistently misleading.

A possible advantage of the crisis moment still keeps us within the realm of seeking truth, but we start to move away from character revelation into ideas. Heated situations may encourage people to speak their minds more freely and display feelings that may be less apparent in calmer times. The white segregationists in *The Children Were Watching* are so angered by the attempt to integrate their schools that they are less reluctant to reveal themselves. While these situations can make fine films, they operate on a different level. The situations bring out buried feelings, but they do not have any depth either. They show us situations we might wish to know about, but if it is insight into people we seek, they don't show a lot. People only matter in these films (*The Children Were Watching*, *Kenya*, *Africa*, *Yanki*, *No!*) as representatives of ideas and rarely in their own right.

Where the crisis moments are genuine and revealing are in situations which one might think would be least true – cases where the camera is clearly influencing the subject. Without doubt, these are the times which can justify pressure situations, although so far as I know, this is the first time a general rule of this sort has been offered in defence of the films. We are treading on dangerous ground, however, so the limitations should be made clear. First, I base this on my general observation that, at best, all we can know of a subject's 'psychology' in these films is the degree to which he is aware of the camera. The whole operation is based upon one key condition, that we feel the subject is trying to hide something about himself. It is that act of deception which can lead to at least the appearance (and hopefully the actual existence) of character depth.

Going back briefly, the Drew films' claim to truth is implicitly two-fold: the crisis moments themselves are more revealing (camera or not), and they are also less subject to camera influence, hence more true. Having spent the last few pages attempting to cast doubt on the first premise, we are now in the process of questioning the second. However, in my maintaining that minimal camera influence in crisis situations is neither necessarily more true or desirable, we still arrive at a conclusion that the films are able to

attain an unexpected degree of success.

The key difference is in what the crisis moment is generally thought to be and what it can sometimes become. Given the condition mentioned above (deception by the subject), the crisis moment is that time when the subject is stripped of his defences as a result of failing in some way. Consequently, this moment would come after the supposed crisis has run its course, after an outcome has been decided.

A moment surely falling in this category (truth through camera influence after usual crisis) is Eddie Sachs after the race in *On the Pole*. First, the stipulated pre-condition is here: Eddie has been boosting an image of himself throughout the film. But only when the race is ended and we see Eddie annoyed by the intrusion of the camera in his defeat do we really begin to learn something about him. Theoretically, this should be the time of least revelation, since the crisis that takes up most of the film (whether he will win the race) has subsided. That crisis has only served the cause of truth by sufficiently weakening Eddie's defences for the final 'kill'. After the race, the complex interplay between the relentlessly following camera and the off-guard subject is truly a fulfilling moment worth the hour's preparation. Eddie shows himself afraid to show disappointment, trying to act 'natural' but not being sure what natural means in terms of the image he wants to present of himself.

Another scene like this is in *Jane* when Miss Fonda reads the reviews after the opening of her show. Her situation is very much like Eddie's — already defeated, not knowing quite how to act, and wanting still to maintain an edge of control over the camera. Though a moment of crisis, it is not correct to say that the camera's presence is less important. In fact, I should think we would want Jane to feel the camera's presence, to be forced finally (but not directly by saying anything to her) to allow penetration of her ritualised defences so carefully maintained in other parts of the film.

The setting up of defences is a necessary condition, for if the subject refuses to place barriers between himself and the camera, trying to reveal character is then like pushing into a pillow, it just gives way and moves somewhere else. Someone like Susan Starr is not an appropriate subject for a crisis situation, since she too easily accepts the camera. Likewise, we would never expect Nehru to reveal himself in crisis because he refuses to become involved in the deception of presenting a special image to the camera. Only subjects offering some resistance have sufficient depth to be rewardingly plumbed within a crisis structure. The revealing moments through camera influence are a reflection of the subject's failure to meet heroic specifications. A more compassionate regard for these people, and a closer relationship with them, would have been a more natural way to observe them. But by choosing to follow them in crisis, the film-makers judge them according to their level

132 of achievement, a complicity with the very forces that expose these people to failure.

This kind of character revelation demands failure. If Eddie had won the race, the film would have been a trifle. Imagining a scene of Jane Fonda reading a favourable review the morning after a hit play is too gruesomely saccharine to keep in mind. The tragic dimensions, the fall from excessive pride, is non-existent if victory is the outcome. Thus, this kind of film, while immensely revealing, is only a chance occurrence. It is character revelation through the luck of witnessing failure, an ironic characteristic in films which generally idolise heroic accomplishment.

The difference between crises of camera influence and the kind Drew prefers is a distinction between psychological and physical crisis. Paradoxically, considering Drew's stated preference for subjects that are 'free', the form of camera truth we have just discussed comes in moments of greatest constriction. Drew's crises are physical acts (success struggles, situations of visible pressure), the truth taken to be those moments when the subject shows himself bearing the burden of conflict. The other cases (like Eddie Sachs, Jane) are post-struggle situations, beyond questions of winning and losing. It is a matter of outer versus inner crisis.

This circuitous journey through the labyrinth of the contention that the crisis structure is a means of investigating people has brought out these points:

1. Crisis moments seek to bring out special kinds of behaviour that, through contrast with other moments, will tell us something about the subject. Generally, they do not tell us anything that adds to our insight into the person or that is sufficient evidence in itself to broaden our understanding of the character.
2. People in crisis situations may demonstrate contrasting behaviour (Moore crying in *The Chair*) that still might not help us understand the person. Observing activities in crisis is no inherent guarantee of more revealing moments. Often, through unavoidable dramatic expectations, these actions can be quite misleading.
3. When people attempting to shape their image before the camera are brought through a crisis that does not leave them triumphant, their struggle to maintain a form of dignity (involving a duplicity towards the camera) can be informative on a psychological level.

The conclusions are not too encouraging, and become even less so when we note that crisis situations are not prerequisite to understanding through camera influence (thus taking the edge off the third point). In *Jane*, for example, the scene of her alone in the dressing room is as revealing as the review scene for essentially the same reason, our awareness that she is putting on an act for the camera. Observing a person in defeat after crisis is only one way to use the camera as a probe. Actually, scenes wholly without dramatic

weight( like the dressing room scene) can be even more revealing, since the subject is freer of immediate preoccupations and better able to concentrate on the subtleties of deception.

But more crucially, we must question seriously the complete efficacy of the crisis structure as a means to learn about people, because even given that structure, the most revealing (and/or interesting) moments have little or no correlation to the level of crisis intensity. In other words, we manage to learn about people *despite* the crisis situations, even within that rigid structure. Here are some examples of the moments I am thinking of:

1. Hubert Humphrey talking and sleeping in the car in *Primary*.
2. David (in film of that title) with his family.
3. Nehru greeting government officials.
4. A street corner singing group in *Petey and Johnny*.
5. George Wallace in *Crisis* describing objects in his office.

All these situations (and countless more) are revealing for no further reason than we learn something, however small, about a person that interested the film-makers and interests us. Freed of the crisis requirement, the moments stand on their own, unbound by the structures of plot advancement. This is rather a backhanded compliment for the crisis structure, however, to say that it makes less pressured moments that slip through seem more honest.

The related ideas of editing and character conception discussed in earlier parts of this chapter (parallel editing for conflict, the Drew heroes) are so closely tied together that the elimination of any one would undermine the necessity of the others. Less emphasis upon crisis would minimise a hero mentality and would not require the suspense of edited contrasts. Likewise, non-heroic subjects will not fall into crisis situations and hence different structures will result. When Drew says they 'discover' the dramatic element, that discovery means that they locate the conditions (crisis situation, active subject) that they know will result in a certain kind of film. That's an awful lot of baggage to carry around, and it results in a kind of uniformity that begins to wear thin.

It might be thought that the crisis moment structure is only a vehicle, simply a technique that can be kept constantly fresh through applying it in an everchanging succession of situations. Would that this were so! The Drew films excel in constant re-examination of a particularly limited area of investigation, the lust for achievement that seems so typically American; but we must recognise that it is not the all-purpose form for a great many subjects. It suited Drew's interests and some fine films have come about through its use, but it is only one possibility for cinema-verite. Structure is the greatest variable in this kind of filming, and Drew's is but one kind.

There's still a whole world unreachable by the crisis structure. Drew found certain elements of American life which were easily adaptable to a structure that found its roots outside cinema, in

134 theatre and photojournalism. Someday, hopefully, the crisis structure will be looked upon as a transitional phase comparable to the early days of the fiction film, when traditional theatrical conceptions had not yet been discarded. Reality is powerful stuff, and Drew and his people got their hooks into only one segment of it. But even the suggestion of future potential is unimaginable without the superb groundwork of these films. I am convinced that their importance as a crucial stage in the development of a whole new kind of cinema can only increase, and that there will always be a great deal to learn from these seminal efforts.

#### Notes

1. Marcocelles and Labarthe, 'Le Cinéma direct nord américain', *Image et Son*, No 183 (April 1965), p 2.
2. Interview with Robert Drew.
3. Gideon Bachmann, 'The Frontiers of Realist Cinema: The Work of Ricky Leacock', *Film Culture*, No 22-23 (Summer 1961), p 18.
4. Marcocelles and Labarthe, *op cit*, p 24.
5. Marcocelles and Labarthe, *op cit*, p 24.
6. Interview with Robert Drew.
7. Patricia Jaffe, 'Editing Cinema Verite', *Film Comment* III (Summer 1965), pp 44-45.
8. Louis Marcocelles, 'Le Cinéma direct nord américain', *Image et Son*, No 183 (April 1965), p 52.
9. 'Documentarists on Documentary' in A William Bluem, *Documentary in American Television*, (New York: Hastings House, 1965), p 259.
10. *Ibid.*
11. Andrew Sarris, 'Digging Dylan', in *Film 67/68*, ed Richard Schickel et al. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1968), p 252.
12. Jean-Claude Bringuier, 'Libres propos sur le cinema-verite', *Cahiers du Cinema*, XXV (July 1963), p 16.
13. Interview with Robert Drew.

First, let me express again my great pleasure at your decision to publish such large sections of the material I sent you. Also, I appreciate your remembering to include the copyright note. That said (quite sincerely), let me move on to several reactions, suggestions, and objections.

Most importantly, I think it is extremely important that mention be made in Part 2 that both sections are excerpts that you have selected from my longer, book-length study. As it stands, especially with your editor's note in regard to the first section, there is a strong impression that the two parts represent a complete work. As you have read a large part of my other work, which is itself only a part of my longer study, you know this is not the case. I would be very grateful if you would acknowledge your own editorial selection, which, frankly, I expected you were going to do in Part 1.

I was surprised to see the inclusion of the Bibliography, as you made no mention in any of your letters of your intention to do this. I don't object to your including it, except that I wish you would have told me, so that I could have prepared a special bibliography which relates to the material published. As it stands, there are dozens of news clippings, brief articles, etc, which only refer to films in sections that you have not printed, which serves no scholarly purpose whatever. Anyone taking the time to look up any of these pieces in hopes of finding further amplification of points raised in the excerpts you published will only be wasting their time.

Even more surprising, and more serious, is the rather ridiculous filmography you have appended, again without your informing me of any desire to do so. I have no idea where you obtained this list (and in fact, would be curious to know), but simply from my material which you have in your possession, you should be able to see a number of things wrong with it. First of all, a glance at my table of contents should show you how woefully incomplete it is. A very simple filmography could have been compiled from this list and the reference to the year of each film in parentheses after the name at the start of each section in the manuscript. It would probably take about half an hour to compile such a list, and if you or any member of your staff did not have the time, I would have been happy to do this for you. The filmography you published is ridiculously fraught with error. To name just a few: *Nehru* was made in 1962 (as you can see on page 90 of *Screen*, Summer 1972!); the proper title is *Kenya, Africa* and not *Kenya, South Africa*, as you indicate; *Eddie* is 1961 and not 1963. Also, the qualification above the list about 'involving two or more of the following' is particularly nonsensical, as *all* the Living Camera films were made by Drew Associates and sponsored by Time. Once

136 again, it would have been no problem for me to draw up a list making a distinction between the Living Camera series and the others, had you told me you wanted this done.

In view of my comments in the above paragraph, I feel it not out of order for me to request that a statement similar to the following appear with Part 2: 'Mr Mamber wishes to state that the filmography appended to Part 1 was not part of his manuscript and was added by *Screen*'. While the filmography now states 'In the absence of a completely accurate filmographic information' (by the way, there's a typographical error in there), it is by no means clear that this is you speaking and not me. If you think it is clear already that *Screen* has added the filmography, then I do not think the suggestion that I failed to supply a filmography is being fair to me, as none was ever requested. Were the filmography even barely adequate I would have no quibble, but in light of what you have chosen to include, I feel that clarification of some sort is certainly necessary.

If you don't mind a further question, though a less important one, I would like to know why you decided to publish the complete Godard statement on Leacock from *Cahiers* under footnote 16 on page 102, which again, is completely your idea without any mention to me. My reference to it was very specific, and I feel that if you wanted to publish his whole statement, it should have been apart from my article and not buried in a footnote. Godard raises points with which I am strongly in disagreement, and I feel you exceed proper editorial bounds by including it in an article bearing my name, giving the impression surely that I am responsible for it being there. Godard's view of Leacock is certainly worth discussing, but if I chose to include it in full, I would surely have done so.

Thank you for your consideration of this letter. I am very sorry to be troublesome, but I feel my objections are reasonable. I look forward to your reply.

Sincerely,

STEPHEN MAMBER